This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

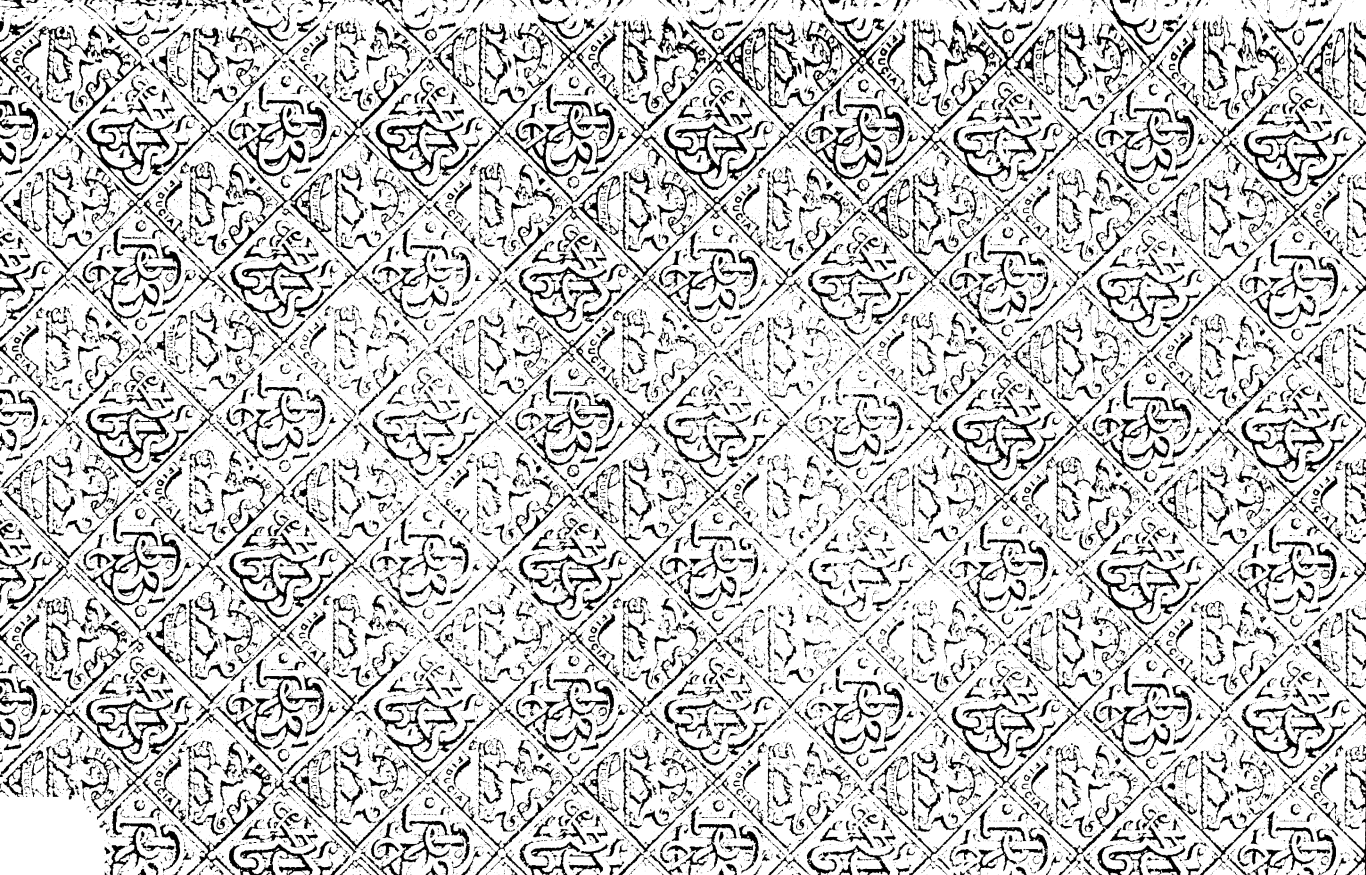
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Matthew Tindale

Vanity Sacrifice



MATTHEW TINDALE.

A Novel.

BY

AUGUSTA A. VARTY-SMITH,

AUTHOR OF "THE FAWCETTS AND GARODS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1891.

(*All rights reserved.*)

LOAN STACK

955
V326
mat
v.1

I DEDICATE

TO

MY BROTHERS

THIS STORY

OF

A BROTHER'S LOVE.

"Quod in strage hominum magnâ evenit, quum ipse se populus premit, nemo ita cadit, ut non alium in se adtrahat; primi exitio sequentibus sunt; hoc in omni vitâ accidere videas licet; nemo sibi tantummodo errat, sed alieni erroris et causa et auctor est."—SENECA.

"To know the whole of a man's past as he knows it himself would be, perhaps, to be unable to reproach him with his worst crimes."—JULIA WEDGWOOD.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	BROTHER AND SISTER	33
III.	THE ASCHENBURGS, GUARDIAN AND WARD	63
IV.	THE TRYSTING-PLACE	82
V.	SIDNEY REFLECTS	105
VI.	QUOIT-PLAYING	126
VII.	THE TINDALES AT HOME	148
VIII.	MATTHEW VISITS HIS LAWYER ...	176

BOOK II.

I.	FRANCES CARTER	199
II.	UNDERCURRENTS	218
III.	WILL HE BE TRUE?	247
IV.	WAKING THOUGHTS	263
V.	GOOD-BYE	277

MATTHEW TINDALE.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

It was the first week in July. The hay harvest had begun, and the fields were lying covered with green swathes which would soon be tossed and turned and piled up into sweet-smelling masses. At Staneby the heavy rains that had fallen in the spring months, filling up the ponds and making the ditches look like rivulets, had continued, with brief intervals of sunshine, until the end of June. There was grass in abundance; but then, grumbled the farmers, what was the use of grass without

the sunshine and wind to turn it into hay? Blackened and mildewed fodder was unwholesome, and cattle and horses couldn't be expected to thrive on it; and if the cattle and horses didn't thrive, how were rents to be paid? So those who possessed weather-glasses rapped them heavily with their knuckles. Oh, it was enough to make even such good men as parsons swear, to see such rain! Thus exclaiming, they would look up at the sky whose clouds were leaden-coloured and without a break.

At length the rain ceased, and in a day or two the ponds were less full and the ditches had dwindled so that they dared not claim kinship with the brooks, their pretty babbling cousins. The sun struggled through the clouds, and but for the mists that rose and refreshed the leaves and grass, which, over-grown things as they were, had no strength to cope successfully with old Sol's rays, the farmers would have had to cry out for rain, and rap their weather-glasses in

hopes of seeing the pointer move down from fair to change. But as it was, the luxuriant growth of the spring months drank up the mists, the delicate stems and tissues learning to hold themselves uninjured to the sun. So the hearts of the farmers were cheered at last, and scythes were sharpened and haymaking was begun in the fields around Staneby.

How hot it had been all day! So at least the haymakers said; but then they had been standing out in the sun since the early morning, and had walked a good many miles as they went up and down the fields raking and tossing the sweet-smelling stuff. Nobody else thought it had been so very hot. But because it had been so hot, and because the most faint-hearted of the farmers could not find any room for doubting that the weather was settled, the haymakers agreed that there was no need to work over-hours; perhaps at the beginning of the week when the hay was really dry, and the horses and carts had been brought out to carry it home,

things would be different, and they would not be particular about leaving off at the regular hour. So the men and women for the most part shouldered their rakes, and made their way home in noisy talkative groups before the clock in the belfry tower of Staneby Hall chimed the quarter after six.

Thin curls of smoke began to rise soon after from the cottage chimneys. All sounds of toil were hushed, and but for the occasional cry of a child from an open doorway, or a laugh that had been raised by some rustic jest, or the faint hum of voices fitful and disjointed, sleep might have fallen upon the village.

It was only from the last group of buildings which stands upon the road running northwards out of Staneby—the road goes through the village in the form of the letter T, branching north, south, and west—that signs of work might still be heard. But if any one had chosen to step past the dwelling-house with its one good-sized window on each side of the doorway, and three above, occupied by

Jonathan Tindale, blacksmith, to the smithy which stood on a lower level and some twenty paces from the road, he could have looked through the square opening that did duty for a window in the smithy wall, and whose shutters with their simple wooden latch were thrown back, and would have seen Jonathan Tindale and his son Matthew still at work.

The rays of the setting sun were reflected from a vice screwed to a rough bench immediately in front of the window, and from a confused mass of pincers, hammers, and nails lying near it. A smell of sulphur, burnt leather, and refuse filled the shop, overpowering the sweet scent of the honeysuckle that grew round the doorway. A low under-current of sound caused by the steady blowing of the bellows under Matthew's powerful hand, ran as an acccompaniment to the rap-tap of the elder Tindale's hammer, who in leathern apron and rolled-up shirt-sleeves was bending over the anvil in the centre of the shop, and striking out sparks that glimmered faintly in the sunlight.

The younger man stood with his straight broad shoulders turned upon the elder one. This was Matthew Tindale, the best shoer of a horse and the best worker in iron that the Fell-side could produce. One begrimed arm was moving the wooden pole by which the bellows were worked, while the other was thrusting a bar of iron into the glowing coals and then withdrawing it, and then again pushing it back where the heat was at its whitest. His blue checked shirt was loosened at the throat, leaving unfettered a brawny chest and neck whose sinews looked like taut ropes. He turned his head from time to time and glanced over his shoulder at the old man; and when he did so the sunlight fell upon his closely cropped fair hair and upon his face. His roughly hewn features were thrown into strong relief by the sunlight; the dark thick eyebrows, the large but well-formed mouth, and the deep-set eyes with their clear and steady expression. He had had a long day's work, from the early July morning till far

into the afternoon. Some of the smoke and soot with which his arms were begrimed had settled upon his upper lip and chin, so that the usually well defined line of the whiskers, that were cropped even more closely than the hair, was faintly distinguishable. Not handsome —no one would have thought of calling Matthew Tindale handsome—but comely looking, straight, tall, and strong: a man who looked as if an old sea-king might have been his progenitor, so proud and self-reliant was his mien.

There was little likeness between the father and the son, and it would have been difficult to discover any physical trait in the stooping form at the anvil pointing to a relationship. The elder man was short and broad set, a fringe of white hair hanging beneath his battered hat and resting on cheeks which showed the growth of a week's beard. Bushy white eyebrows overhung the dark eyes, that were as keen and bright as in the days when, with a piece of

hawthorn in his button-hole, he wandered down the lanes where he knew pretty Martha Fletcher might be found herding her father's cows. He had been handsome then, and village maidens had been wont to hang their heads coquettishly whenever he came past their doors, and had feigned to be too busy with their knitting to mark how gallantly he stepped and how bravely he swung his arms. But if he failed to speak to them, their fingers would stop their deft movements, and they would crane their necks to look after him—and this for disappointment—but Jonathan Tindale, not knowing the ways of women, missed this flattery. Now the once straight back is bent, and the head that was held so smartly droops forward habitually on the chest; and the arms are rendered unshapely by muscles enormously developed, and the hands are scarred, and the finger-joints twisted and overgrown.

With each blow of the hammer, the breath came through Jonathan Tindale's nostrils with a short grunting sound, as if forced from him

by the exertion; and when the sweat trickled down his forehead and cheeks, and he stopped to wipe it off with his grimy arm, he cleared his throat with a deep sonorous cough. In one of these pauses he turned to his son, saying, as he looked at him from under the brim of his hat—

"Where's oor Maggie off to this efterneun? She passed me when I was busy with them nails in t' winda, an' I looked after her just as a body might when their mind's ta'en up with summut else, for I wasn't rightly thinkin' on her—an' I saw her stop by t' gate theer, an' then in a minute, afore one could say 'Jack Robinson,' she hed her foot on t' bottom bar an' was ower't like a shot."

"Mother'll likely know," answered Matthew indifferently, bringing the iron bar from the fire and laying it on the anvil. Then, taking up a hammer, he began to swing it with one arm, causing blow after blow to echo through the forge, until, his father joining him, the two men faced each other, and, striking the

glowing mass alternately, chimed out a wild music of clashing sounds.

"How many inches did ye say was t'measure across t' crank?" asked the elder Tindale.

"Five; but we're not ready for that," returned the son, as he lifted up the bar and put it into the fire.

"I doubt if ye'll hev't ready by to-morrow morning." The old man straightened his back as he spoke, and rubbing a hand across his forehead pushed his hat to the back of his head.

"Well, I promised it, an' I've a pride in sayin' I never give back my word to any man. There's a good many hours atween now an' daybreak, an' Matthew Tindale isn't one to turn his back on a bit o' work."

"Chances are if he'll want it after a'. He's such a queer chap. Folks never rightly know how to take him. Old Aschenburg is worth fifty such as yon."

There was a pause which was broken only by the sound of the bellows, the elder man

resting his hands on his hips and watching each movement of his son with an observant eye. Then, as if he had been pondering upon an answer to the question he was about to put, he said—

"I wonder what he can want with such a fandanglement. Did he tell ye?"

"He said he was wantin' an omertary, an' I wad be as likely a chap to help him as any he could find."

"A *what?*"

"An omertary. That's what he called it anyway."

"I never heard tell o' one," returned the old man in a perplexed tone.

"Neither hev I," answered the son dryly, drawing the red-hot bar as he spoke from the fire; "but I know I could go to France and make as good a horseshoe as them frog-eating chaps an' never know their name for't."

"Hum," returned the old man, taking up his hammer and feeling that he was unable to see the point of Matthew's remark.

Again savage music was struck out, as the hammers fell alternately with mighty swing upon the bar. The glowing metal turned to a dingy red and finally to a slate colour, as it slowly broadened under the blows until, at last cooling, both men ceased from work, the elder one leaning on his hammer, the younger with his great chest expanded and his head held up that he might breath more freely. Beads of sweat stood on the old man's forehead, and Matthew's eyes falling at that moment on the stooping figure and weary face, he stretched out his hand for the hammer upon which his father's fingers were folded tremulously.

"Here, give us hold," he said. "Ye've wrought hard. The likes o' you should take rest afore this. It's only such chaps as me as can go from sunrise to sunset of a July day."

"Nay, nay, I'se good for a deal o' work yet;" and the elder man impatiently put his son's hand aside. "Away wi' ther. Put t' bar intul t' fire, an' lets hev another gang wi' it.'

The son took no notice of these words, but stepping up to one of the wooden shutters, looked at his watch which was hanging there over a nail.

"She's just gone nine"—Matthew kept his watch an hour before the day—"an' it's almost a wonder mother hasn't called us afore this."

"Just gone nine, hes 't?" The old man seemed to be deliberating over some question in his own mind as he said this. He put down his hammer with an air of hesitation, and then taking off his hat busied himself with arranging the lining. "Well, if it's as late as that, I won't argyfye but what it's time for us to shut up. A day's work's a day's work; not but what I can put in as long a one as ever I did. We can both do that, you and me. But as you say, my lad, I think we may as well strike work for to-day."

The old man having arranged the lining of his hat, he gave a look at his son which told unmistakably how much more satisfied he would be if they left the forge together. Old

Jonathan Tindale always resented the idea that he ever gave up working before his son.

"Are ye comin', Mattha?" For the old man still hesitated.

"Ay, I'm comin'," was the laconic answer; but instead of doing what his words intimated, Matthew began raking the scattered cinders together on the hearthstone.

And so somewhat unwillingly Jonathan Tindale moved towards the door.

The fire made up, Matthew went to the window and looked out over the fair English landscape. The distant hills that bounded the western horizon had turned a rosy purple, their outlines dimly defined in the brilliancy of the light which like a sheet of molten gold marked the position of the setting sun. His eyes looked unflinchingly at the light; they were strong eyes; when the smithy fire roared beneath the furious blasts driven by his hand, and both coal and iron were turned to a white heat, they needed no protection; so in like manner they met unfalteringly the glow

of light that rose up from the west. For fully a minute he stood thus, then slowly and abstractedly his eyes roved from one well-known landmark within the valley to another—the undulating hills and dales; the scattered groups of trees; the stretches of compact woods; distant villages and homesteads, each were regarded by him in turn. Then his eyes followed the road, which now appearing distinctly, now disappearing behind some knoll or steep acclivity, ran with many deviations from the market town of Merton up to the village of Staneby. There, just where that triangular-shaped field skirts the long narrow strip of wood, the road first touches the Staneby Hall estate, and Matthew called to mind how at that point Sir William Garod's gamekeepers had come upon Neddy Kendal, the village shoemaker, who was often suspected of poaching, and how they had lost their case because they could not prove that he had been on the Staneby side of the wall. A quarter of a mile nearer the village the road is bounded

on both sides by Sir William Garod's land; but here the bank which rises abruptly from the valley and runs gradually up to the foot of the Pennine range of hills, and on the breast of which Staneby stands, obstructed Matthew's view of the road, and he turned his eyes, which half mechanically had traced its windings, to the thick plantation stretching to his right from the foot of the bank far up toward the hills, and within whose embracing arm rose the red sandstone chimneys of Derthwaite. This led him to think of young Mr. Sidney Aschenburg, its owner, and the "omertary" which he had commissioned him to make. And straightway Matthew Tindale turned from the window, and lifting the bar of iron from the anvil, began once more to consider how best it should be made to take the many curves and angles of the "omertary's" fantastic shape.

There is a book in the library at Derthwaite containing a paragraph marked with a line of red ink; and, as if that were not sufficient

to draw the reader's attention, an arrow pointing to it has been drawn upon the side of the page. It runs as follows:—

"Derthwaite, in Cumberland, occupies the site of a Cistercian priory which was founded by Robert de Malleban in the first year of the reign of Richard Cœur de Lion. Before joining the army of the Crusaders, de Malleban gave to the community the ground on which the priory was to stand, and three corucates of land and ten acres of meadow in the immediate neighbourhood, with two hundred and fifty acres of land, lying on the west side of the river Eden; pannage for their hogs, and those of their tenants in the forest of Helton, and sufficient timber for their houses; common of pasture for their cattle upon the Fell, belonging to the township of Merton; a well or spring at Talby, for daily remembrance at the altar of the Blessed Virgin for the soul of Catherine his wife; a yearly rent of half a mark of silver out of his lands at Ulgarth; one free net in

the river Eden; the tithes of all the venison, as well in flesh as skins, and of the skins of foxes, wherever they should be hunted; of his lakes and fishings, and the tithes in his waste lands of fowls, calves, lambs, pigs, wool, cheese, and butter, and, when cultivated, tithes of the produce of those lands. The priory was surrendered to the commissioners of Henry VIII. in 1536, at which time the community consisted of a prior and eight monks, their revenue being £57 7*s.* 11*d.* This priory remained in the possession of the crown until the reign of Elizabeth who, on March the 1st, 1560, granted the priory and the adjacent lands to William Malby, afterwards Sir William Malby, Knt., an illegitimate son of William, Lord Malby of the North. Thomas Malby, grandson of Sir William Malby, to whom the grant of Derthwaite Priory was made, sold the property to Sir John Bletcher, Knt., of Sutton, who gave it in marriage with his eldest daughter Bridget, to John, second son of James Carrodan, Esq., of Kindenlow,

with whose descendants it remained until 1850, when it was sold to Dr. Joseph Aschenburg of London, who left it by will to his son Sidney."

Mrs. Aschenburg had been reading this paragraph on the same evening as that on which Jonathan and Matthew Tindale were working at what the elder had termed "a fandanglement" of her son. And as she paced the terrace which runs in front of Derthwaite, a white shawl wrapped round her shoulders, and her left hand gathering up the skirts of her black silk gown, her mind turned upon it with some complacency. This pedigree of her son's estate was long and aristocratic, and had, through a curious process of reasoning, come to be looked upon by Mrs. Aschenburg as a fit substitute for the long line of ancestry which she would have liked to possess. For Mrs. Aschenburg was a proud woman, and would have ignored, if she could, the fact of being daughter and sole heiress of a Hackney brewer.

A low band of cloud, turned by the sun

into a semblance of molten gold, lay behind Helvellyn, Skiddaw, and Blencathra. Bars of cloud hung in bright refulgence upon the amber sky, and above these stretched bands of rose colour and deepest crimson, which as they approached the zenith paled and changed to clouds of grey. Each object in the valley which lies between the wooded hill that shelters Derthwaite from the east, and the mountains that, rising suddenly out of the fertile plain, form a barrier in the west, was seen in the distinctness peculiar to evening light. The fields of young corn, and those which were lying under the swathes of grass left by the mower; the clusters of white cottagers; the scattered buildings which dot the landscape; undulating woodlands that break the monotony of meadow and arable lands; the windings of the river Eden;—everything was illuminated by that clearness of atmosphere which has a beauty of its own, though it has to yield the palm to the suggestive loveliness of mist and haze.

The lowing of cattle broke occasionally upon the stillness, with now and then the bleating of a lamb, the bark of a dog, or the voices of a few straggling haymakers returning home. Birds warbled softly in the trees, as they sat with puffed-out feathers and heads buried deeply in their breasts; others hopped from twig to twig with low chirps, or, with sudden thought, leaned forward with outstretched heads and extended wings, to fly across some open space and alight in a tree beyond. Far-travelled bees came home on wearied wings, their soft hum sounding as a faint accompaniment to the burr of the night insect which was setting out thus early on its wanderings. All the loveliness of a summer evening had spread itself over the land.

Derthwaite stood in the stiff formality of early nineteenth-century architecture. The sunset fell upon its windows—six of equal size on either side of the doorway and thirteen above—all blazing like sheets of

flame. The old priory, which had been built in place of that partially demolished by the Scotch at the beginning of the sixteenth century, had been pulled down in 1805 by one of the Carrodans, and replaced by this more modern structure, whose frontage and wing, running back on the north side to the stables, showed the rich colouring of red sandstone, subdued a little by weather and tinted with lichens.

Below the broad gravelled terrace is a garden of irregularly shaped beds, clumps of heather, and clipped box trees. Then the ground slopes gradually, and is intersected by several yew hedges of great age, and beyond that is a shrubbery with winding paths; then comes a rustic paling and meadows, which are skirted by the river Eden.

To the south, and therefore between Derthwaite and Staneby, the meadow land is broken by an out-crop of sandstone that rears itself in high-piled strata on each side of the stream, which it narrows into sullen

blackness. It is in this gorge that the salmon, now headstrong, now full of fear, nestle against the rocks that are hidden beneath the dark waters, or suddenly, with a quick movement, flash like a beam of light through the air, to fall with splashes and foam. Brambles stretch out their prickly trailers and hang over the face of the cliffs; tufts of heather, with here and there a clump of gorse, grow where the ledges have caught the crumbling waste of centuries; and in the deeper niches, safely hidden from the rays of the midday sun, the enchanter's nightshade may be found. It is here that the low swift flight of the dipper is seen as it skims from one resting-place to another; and in the hollow of the old tree which stands where the meadow merges into the upheaved land, is built the nest of the pied fly-catcher. A wood of oak, larch, and pine stretches from this gorge, which is known amongst the country people by the name of The Devil's Pot, hedging in the meadows and gently

sloping ground, until rising it encircles the back of Derthwaite itself, which it shelters from the driving force of the east wind.

As Mrs. Aschenburg slowly paced the terrace, her shawl slipped down and displayed the handsome shoulders which were proudly borne, and the outline of her bosom with its ample width and depth. She was a woman of good presence, whose maturity suggested development only and gave no hint of decay. A tall, fair woman, with blue eyes, that had lost but little of their youthful brightness, and which still turned in dignified astonishment upon any who touched with profane hand the border of her garment. Her pink and white complexion was scarcely less clear than in the days when young men contended with each other at supper parties for the honour of proposing the health of the Hackney belle; and if her hair, which she wore in flat curls upon the sides of her face, was sprinkled with grey, the fairness of its original colour rendered the grey scarcely visible. Her hands were large,

white and well formed, hands which looked as though they would take others stretched out to greet them into warm palms, and fold lithe fingers round them with a tender yet firm embrace, but which instead offered but the cold nerveless touch, and the pressure of fingers and thumb which is scarcely perceptible.

Eight o'clock sounded from the tower above the stables, and no one had summoned Mrs. Aschenburg to dinner. She had turned round several times and looked with an observant expression toward the open doorway of the house, and had drawn out her watch and gravely contemplated it.

At length there was the flutter of a light print dress, and a tiny old woman, a little under five feet in height, appeared on the steps, pausing as if in search of some one, with hand shading her eyes. Mrs. Aschenburg saw her and stood motionless, her face turned toward the new-comer; but she neither called nor made any sign with her hand.

Presently the dim eyes—which were often distinctly stated by their owner to be as good as ever at a long distance, only just a little weak for open hemming and feather-stitching—caught sight of the tall figure standing at the end of the terrace with head and shoulders outlined against the sky; and the little old woman trotted down the short flight of steps leading from the entrance door and came toward it, while the edge of her print dress caught and rolled over the larger stones of the gravel.

This was Abel, who as a plump rosy young woman had had the charge of Mrs. Aschenburg in her babyhood. A white muslin cap with a deep border enclosed the face, which was still smooth and rosy, and a neckerchief of the same material was folded round her throat, and tucked under her dress. A pretty, clean-looking old woman, with thin strands of grey hair, which were brought carefully down her cheeks, and turned up beneath her ears.

"My dear," she said, as she got near to

Mrs. Aschenburg, speaking with a slight lisp, for the teeth being gone from the upper jaw, her lip was fain to fall in, "you're letting your shawl come right off your shoulders—and you that suffers at night from rheumatics."

No one but Abel ever used a term of endearment to Mrs. Aschenburg, and it always sounded curiously inapplicable to the woman, whose self-confidence and self-complacency seemed to carry her far above the sphere which could be reached by the love and sympathy of any one. Strangers who heard her thus addressed by the old servant, experienced a sensation of pitying wonder and compassion, just as though they had seen the rosy lips of a child pressed half in playfulness, half in love, upon the cheek of a marble statue; and then their pitying sympathetic feelings would grow after a time into one of astonishment alone, that such familiarity—for in some way or other a caress given by any one to Mrs. Aschenburg always appeared to be a familiarity—was not resented.

"I am not cold, thank you, Abel." Nevertheless one of Mrs. Aschenburg's large white hands drew the shawl round her shoulders as she spoke. "Why is dinner not ready?" And then, without waiting for a reply, she continued with a slight touch of asperity in her tone, "The usual reason, I suppose; Mr. Sidney has a sky to finish, a song to sing, or a new book that must be looked at."

"Well, my dear," began the little old woman, shading her eyes with her hand, as she lifted her face to her mistress's, for there was still brightness in the evening sky, "I tell you many and many a time you expect that boy to behave himself like a grown-up man;"—Sidney Aschenburg was five and twenty, but Abel could never realize the fact —"you cannot, and you never will put old heads on young shoulders; leastways, not on such shoulders as Master Sidney has, bless him. Why, they were never made to carry trouble and care and thought; at any rate, not for many a year to come. You should not

expect it, and you shouldn't ask it. You'll see when he gets old enough he'll be ready enough to take thought for every one."

"Is that why dinner is late, Abel?"

"I thought, my dear, you would not mind waiting ten minutes, and giving him a chance of getting in. Mr. Sparkes asked me about it, and I said I was quite sure you would be agreeable."

There was a touch of pride in the way in which Mrs. Aschenburg here lifted up her face. Then she asked if her son had left any message before going out.

"Yes, my dear, of course he did. I always say if any one in this world is misunderstood, it's that boy. Why, my dear, he went and gave himself the trouble of telling Mr. Sparkes that if he was late for dinner, he had to give you his compliments, and say that he was 'skying,' and beg you to excuse him."

"But you said he had gone out."

"Yes. And no wonder that he changed his mind this beautiful evening, and went out

for a walk instead of messing on with his paints. No one can blame him for that. Sarah tells me she saw him take up his hat and stick a couple of hours ago, and set off in that direction." Here a finger was stretched out toward the river.

"He has very often kept me waiting dinner lately."

"Not so many times if they were properly reckoned up," urged the old nurse tenderly, as she smiled at her mistress. "But it's far easier, they say, to do addition than subtraction, and I dare say they're right—indeed, I am sure of it, when I remember the number of things people always find to say against my boy."

The faintest shadow of a smile flitted over the proud face of the listener, and then she rejoined, "No one can charge you, good Abel, with handing over a balance of evil-speaking. But then you put false payments to the credit side, and surely that is quite as bad. However, we will talk no more of it, for I would

like you to go in now and tell Sparkes that I will wait dinner no longer for Mr. Sidney."

Mrs. Aschenburg watched the little pink-and-white apple-blossom of an old woman as she trotted along, with hands folded above the muslin apron, and feet that planted themselves unhesitatingly upon the gravelled path; then, so soon as the diminutive figure had disappeared within the doorway, she turned her head and began pacing once more up and down the terrace. Not many minutes had elapsed, however, before the folds of her dress began to slip through her slackening hold, her eyes no longer looking upon the distant hills, but lowered to the ground, while her steps became uneven and hesitating, until at length she stopped altogether in her walk. She remained in this position for a minute or more, then a flush stole over the handsome face, and as it crept over temple, cheek, and ear she was recalled to a consciousness of her surroundings. She hastily drew herself up, cast a suspicious glance at the windows which were nearest to

her, and then with erect head and firm step went toward the farthest boundary of the terrace.

The air perhaps had turned suddenly chilly, or the night dews had begun to fall, or it might be that something in the far-spreading expanse of country, its mountains fading from purple to ashen grey, its golden sky losing its luminous brightness and assuming the opalescence of evening, the mist rising from the low lying lands and softening the outlines of every object with its thin haze, had a depressing influence upon Mrs. Aschenburg's spirits; for she gave a deep shivering sigh, and, drawing her shawl more tightly round her shoulders, turned her eyes from the distant landscape and bent them upon the gravel-path at her feet.

CHAPTER II.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

WHILE Mrs. Aschenburg was pacing the terrace in front of Derthwaite, Matthew Tindale was patiently working the bar of iron, on which he was engaged for her son, into strange and fantastic shapes. Now it was bent at right angles, now curved, now flattened and broadened in one part, now narrowed and made tapering. Now under the blows of Matthew's hammer it bent itself into delicate curves. Where it had been thinned and beaten into a flat and shapeless mass it grew into the likeness of leaves and tendrils, and in its thickest part it yielded to the force of steel and suffered a network of

piercings. Many times did Matthew take his foot rule, and measuring its proportions, compare them with the directions written round a pen-and-ink drawing which was nailed up in the window. At length he seemed satisfied, and with one final glance at each turn and curve, he placed his work carefully on a shelf.

In a few minutes he had raked the fire together, and with one stride had got upon the hearthstone, where a seat was placed against the wall, capable of holding half a dozen people if they were content to sit close. Then he pulled a pipe out of his pocket and prepared for his evening smoke.

He had not sat many minutes, however, when he heard the sound of footsteps approaching the window, followed by a voice, saying, in a low tone—

"Mattha, are ye there?"

Matthew, who was sitting with his elbows on his knees, and his hands held toward the fire, started slightly, and then, without moving the pipe from his lips, said—

"Come away, Maggie, come along. I'm just hevin' my pipe."

Another minute, and a tall figure stooped to pass under the long trailers of honeysuckle which hung above the doorway. Then it hesitated and paused.

"Are ye there by yerself, Mattha?" asked the new-comer.

"Yes, come away, an' I'll give ye a hand up."

The woman came forward into the dim firelight, and, placing her foot on the edge of a stone trough that stood near, stepped, with the ease of one accustomed to the task, upon the cinder-strewn hearth, and took her seat at Matthew's side.

This was Maggie, Jonathan and Martha Tindale's only daughter. She was Matthew's junior by ten years, but so tall and finely proportioned that she looked more like five and twenty than the eighteen years which she had reckoned at Whitsuntide. Her complexion was of a clear olive, and her features

were well cut and regular; the mouth and nose were delicately formed, and the eyes were of a deep violet with timidity suggested in their expression. She took off her hat so soon as she was seated by her brother's side, letting all the mass of black hair be seen which grew low upon her forehead, its heavy bands tucked above her ears and gathered in a knot hanging somewhat low at the nape of the neck. A very beautiful woman, of that refined type which is rarely met with amongst the people; beautiful as a Nile lily growing in its native streams, untended, uncared for, with no setting of Etruscan vase nor background of mirrors and palms. She held a bunch of harebells in her hand, and as she sought to fasten them together several slipped from her hold and fell amongst the ashes at her feet.

There was no sound for several minutes but the rustling of the harebells and the steady puffing of Matthew's pipe. At length, with eyes fixed on the fire and the long powerful

hands held out toward its warmth, he said—

"Where hev ye been, Maggie?"

His companion gave a slight start at these words, and there was a momentary hesitation before she answered, saying, "Away out for a walk—down the river-side a little bit, to see if I could find some forget-me-nots."

"Yer wadn't find many. I should say it's late for such as them."

As Matthew spoke he put his hand thoughtfully into his breast-pocket, and brought out the sheet of paper with the pen-and-ink drawing, that had hung on the window while he was at work. He unfolded it; then, stooping down, held it so that it should catch the firelight, while he slowly read the measurements aloud in a subdued tone, and occasionally examined the drawing.

Is it true that these great, loving, passionate souls of ours are dependent for a medium of communication one with the other upon service clumsily rendered by the lip, or eye,

or ear? Has that spiritual essence, with its mighty foretaste of life apart from all the conditions imposed upon it by time and space, to yield itself to the puerile powers of the material body, and be dependent upon it for its means of expression? Must the soul with its throbbing heart—ay, heart that is but faintly imaged in the slowly pulsating one of flesh—must it pant, and agonize, and leave the bitter workings of its life-blood to be expressed through mortal channels? Has the soul, with powers scarcely other than divine, been thus chained during the far-gone vista of years wherein wave after wave of generations ebbs back into the sea of the golden age and is lost upon its shore? or did not men in that happy time consciously live in their dual world, the spiritual part untrammelled by the material, and without voice, or sign, or gesture of their grosser form communicate in a speech now lost to man? Is it the remembrance of this power which clings to us in fantastic moments, or are we dreaming of orient beams,

which, as faint shafts foretelling the rising of the king of day, are stealing upon us with promise of a dawn full of roseate splendour, to be followed by a meridian of glorious light?

Simple Maggie Tindale, as she sat in front of the smithy fire beside her brother, her trembling fingers raising flower after flower to be fastened together by a blade of meadow grass, was struggling under a sore need of that communication of soul with soul which desires something finer than words, and something of more subtile essence than sound. Words are vague and unsatisfactory things to employ, when we would picture the world of emotion which lies within; and the very sound of our own voice startles us by its rough incongruity, and causes us to shrink back from giving the confidences after which our souls yearn.

Maggie's breath came thickly as the minutes passed, and her fingers at length failed to do the task that she had laid out for them, while her head drooped lower and lower on her

bosom. The firelight fell upon her clearly cut profile and threw it into strong contrast with the dark background beyond; the droop of the beautiful eyelids, the curve of the lips and chin appearing like carved ivory against the thick shadows which were now creeping out of the corners, and down from the smithy roof, encircling every part with their weird arms, save that tiny spot which was guarded by the red embers on the hearth.

Ten minutes must have passed in this way, the brother and sister silently occupied with their own thoughts, until at length the latter raised her head, and with a visible effort said—

"Did ye ever feel as if every place had all of a sudden grown bonnier, an' as if the sunshine was warmer an' brighter than ever ye'd seen it before?"

Matthew moved his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, but did not turn his head toward Maggie, or in any way alter his position; he merely raised his eyes from the

paper in his hand to the wall opposite, and drew the smoke through his pipe with a long steady breath as though he would signify by these things that he was attending to her.

Maggie had turned giddy at the sound of her own voice, and paused for a second or two before she could continue. To her, those simple words which she had just spoken seemed to contain the very confession of a lifetime, and that no matter how many more words she might add to them their meaning could never be intensified, nor a deeper truth told than that which they had already revealed. When she had recovered her self-possession, it was therefore with some surprise and disappointment that she saw how little her brother had been impressed by what she had said. For a moment natural reserve and timidity struggled together to hold her silent, until a new and stronger power that had risen lately within her, a power which was widening the boundaries of her world, made its presence felt, and broke down the old

opposing barriers of shyness and pride. Then she continued—

"Have you ever in your life felt, Mattha, as if everything outside o' the house was fairly glintin' with sunshine, an' that even if ye pulled up a little wee daisy an' looked at it, that the white fringe shone like satin, an' its yella eye was far more beautiful than even ye'd thought on?" Here Maggie's voice became tremulous, and her dark eyes moist and shining with a liquid light. "An' the birds—why that they're just fit to crack their little throats with singin', an' that they make one's heart fairly loup right up in one's bosom for gladness. Did ye never feel such a like feel as that, Mattha?"

Matthew turned himself a little on his seat so that he could look at his sister, and began to rub his chin thoughtfully between his thumb and forefinger. Then he said—

"I think God Almighty's world is a grand place to live in, Maggie. An' even when the sun fairly pours into the smithy on the hottest

day, an' I've got more work than I can get done afore sunset, an' the sweat just running off me like water, I've a right thankful feel in my heart all the time, and every now and again I cannot help striking out a tune just to show it like."

"But this is quite a partic'lar feel that I mean. I'm glad *here*." And Maggie laid one hand on her bosom as she spoke. Then, seeing that he made no attempt to answer her, she went on hesitatingly, while a delicate flush overspread her face, "Ye're older nor me a long way, Mattha, an' surely ye must hev seen somebody that has made ye feel as I feel."

Now at least he will understand me, she thought; now he will help me to say all that I want to say.

It was a minute before Matthew answered her. His eyes were fixed thoughtfully on her face, as if he were trying to gather the full meaning of her words and compare it with his own experience. Then he took a deep breath, and said—

"I've never been beholden to any man for happiness; I'm beholden to them for being put out at times, but never for being happy. I remember when father an' me differed there, when he was wantin' to put me to joinerin', I didn't feel comfortable an' couldn't sleep at nights, but as soon as ever he said I might come into t' shop with him I felt just the same as I'd always done. But it wasn't him that made me easy like—he had only bothered me, an' when he gave it up I slipped back into my old place."

"Eh, but, Mattha, would ye still hev that real glad feel if ye were sittin' with yer hands in front o' ye, no pipe nor nothing? I have it sure enough when I'm workin' about the house washin' dishes an' such like; but when everything's tidied an' put away an' I may take my knitting to the door, an' if I like, just lay my stocking down in my lap an' look right over the fields an' woods until I feel quite dreamy, then it is that I feel the happiest feel of all." Maggie paused for her

brother to reply; but, seeing that he made no attempt to speak, she continued in a disappointed tone, "It's a queer thing that ye cannot understand me. I'm wantin' to tell ye something very badly, Mattha, an' I cannot rightly get at the words."

"It's mebbe because ye're a woman an' I'm a man that I cannot just make out yer meaning."

Here Matthew put out one of his hands and took that of his sister's which lay nearest, and placing it on his knee smoothed it caressingly with his open palm.

A simple action, but it is difficult for the undemonstrative Northern nature to make any sign by which the loveliness and depth of its pent-up feeling may be discerned. Only a grasp of the hand may be given, or a rough word, coupled perhaps with a rustic oath, and yet it may be that a friend has been gained who may be reckoned on in the hour of need so long as life lasts.

Maggie understood this little caressive action

of her brother's, and a warm glow of love toward him shot through her frame; but the hand that was lying on his knee remained motionless, and there was no perceptible movement made which would bring her nearer to him. The response came in the ready rising of the words to her lips, and in the ease with which her low clear voice spoke every word.

"A curious thing has happened to me, Mattha; an' though it has made me feel just as if my feet scarcely touched the ground for gladness, yet at the back of it all I'm frightened, an' feel as scared as if I had had a warnin' such as came to us the week before grandmother died. I have the same creepy feel as when we heard the rustlin' at the winda, an' that queer tappin' as if somebody was beatin' with their finger-nails against the wall—the death-watch, grandmother said it was; I can mind it as if it only happened yesterday. Well, I feel just like that at times, only ye understand there's no rustlin', nor tappin', nor nothing, only just the feel

that I have inside of me. Yet, Mattha, it's very wicked of me to talk like this, for I've nothing that should make me afraid."

Matthew never turned his eyes from his sister's face as she said these words, nor did he cease the caressive smoothing of her hand. Nevertheless, a startled feeling had taken possession of him, and there was a beating against the walls of his chest as though he had set himself a mighty task of wrestling with anvil and hammer. His mind was filled with vague doubt, anxiety, and dread as to what she could be going to tell him.

"Mattha, I can tell ye very little about it," Maggie continued, in the same steady tones, "for he has made me promise to keep it from mother an' father an' everybody—indeed I don't want the folks here in the village to know about it, or it wad be like puttin' a match into one of Neddy Kendal's tins o' gunpowder; there wad be no tellin' where such a burst-out might end."

"I see what ye're wantin' to tell me,

Maggie—there's some courting going on. But it's a queerish thing that a chap should try to keep it from them that hes a right to know it. I don't like the sound. If a chap means fair to a woman, he'll step out in broad daylight an' let them that will say him nay. I don't like it, Maggie, I tell ye; and I don't think much of him, whoever he is, to hev asked ye to give him yer word in such a business." Matthew's hand stopped the slow backward and forward action, and now closed firmly over his sister's, and he lifted himself up, and brought his face to a nearer level with hers. "I tell ye, Maggie, I don't like it," he continued, "an' I'm glad ye've opened yer mind to me; an' if ye'll give me his name, I'll go to him an' tell him if he means to hev a chance of winnin' ye he must speak ye fair, an' come about the place after ye like a man."

"Mattha, I can't do that; I've promised him. Besides, if ye knew all about it ye'd say I'd fairly gone wrong o' my head, an' was only fit for t' 'sylum. An' yet"—here it was

Maggie's turn to make some outward token of affection, her hand releasing itself from her brother's grasp, and interlacing its fingers with those of the powerful hand that covered it—"an' yet ye wouldn't call me crazy if ye knew the feel that's come into my heart. I've not gone wrong o' my head, Mattha, but I'm fairly giddy with happiness; and behind it all comes that queer feel that makes me scared, an' as if I would like to run away from myself an' everybody, an' forget all about the last few months."

A perturbed expression was upon Matthew's face as he listened to these words, and he gave several uneasy movements with his shoulders, until the broad straight back and muscular neck and head towered some inches above his sister's.

"Ye must tell me the chap's name," he began, "for ye've made me feel very uneasy about this courtin'. There's something wrong about it."

"Mattha, what do ye mean?" and there

was a faint sound of reproach in Maggie's voice as she said these words.

"Nay, not wrong on your side, my lass; I'm not blamin' you. But whenever I hear tell of secret doings—a'most about anything—I begin to say to myself, them chaps are not dressed up i' their right clothes, an' if we were to rive them off, we would most likely find such a set of smellin' rags as we couldn't easily light of in a day's march. Depend upon it, when folks can only go about at nights with dark lanterns in their han's, they're not going the same road as honest ones. An' that's just what I feel about this chap of yours."

"Don't, Mattha; ye're forgettin' who ye're talkin' about."

"Nay; I've never known," was the grim reply.

"But ye know this much—ye know he's fairly made the whole world a different place to me. I cannot bear to hear anything against him, Mattha, so ye mustn't try." The girl's

hand here curled itself round that of the man and held it tenderly, while the low voice thrilled with the depths of the love that was striving for utterance. "To say, Mattha, that he will ever be my husband, would be like a little common flower in the hedgerow saying that the sun would shine upon it always—I can never get my thoughts as far as that—but he is the man *now* who says he loves me, an' whose voice is the sweetest sound that ever came into my ears, an' I feel as if I must stand by him, an' not let any one speak against him just as if I were his wife."

"Ye're right enough in that, Maggie. I tell ye it's him that's wrong to go an' persuade ye to keep his courtin' of ye from yer own folk. But there's promises which is a sin to break, an' there's promises which is a sin to keep, an' I take it that this is one of them."

"Mattha, I cannot tell ye." The girl's delicate complexion seemed to turn a paler hue as she said this, and the dark, lovely eyes looked up earnestly into her brother's face.

"I have told ye all that I can rightly tell ye. For it seemed such a thing, that when me an' you had been so close together for all these years, more like twin brother an' sister than anything else, I should hev anything in my bosom hid away from ye. I've long been wantin' to tell ye the little that I could, an' now that I've done it I feel right glad an' thankful in my heart." Then, after a pause, and in a broken voice, she added, "Mattha, old chap, I feel as if I've set off to walk by myself through a wood with holes in it, an' rocks, an' all kind of horrible places; an' ye I didn't set off myself; things just fell out, an' I walked on quite unconscious like."

"Maggie, tell me his name." And Matthew turned round on the bench at these words, so that his face was brought almost opposite to his sister's, while he grasped both her hands and held them with the firm clasp which implies that an answer must be given before there will be any release. "Ye said right," he went on, "about you an' me bein' true

brother and sister. But do ye think ye are doin' fair by me to keep back his name? Ye've put very uneasy thoughts in my mind —thoughts that'll be with me first thing when I awake in the morning, an' the last thing when I lie down at night."

"Don't make me wish I had kept it all back from ye, Mattha." The girl's uplifted eyes were becoming slowly filled with tears. "I've done nothing wrong—nothing that you or anybody else could point a finger at. I'm as honest a girl as ever steps the village, an' my name's as white as it was on my christenin' mornin'."

Matthew loosened her hands suddenly, his voice growing hoarse and his manner constrained as he spoke.

"Then tell him that ye've a brother that has no notion of any underhanded courtin', and that if he won't let you tell me his name, I'll find a way that'll make him call it out before all Staneby."

"Mattha, I see ye're getting angry with

me." And two great tears rolled over the dark eyelashes of the speaker, and fell from her cheek to her folded hands.

"Nay, my lass; but you've put such a thorn in my breast as will prevent me workin' easy for many a day."

"I wish I hadn't told ye; I wish I had kept it all to myself." Maggie's voice was slightly raised with these words, and there was a touch of bitterness in it. "Menfolk make such a song about things. I never thought that you'd hev taken on so about it, or I'd never have told. I'm not the first woman that's had a sweetheart of a different rank of life to her own, an' I'm pretty sure I shall not be the last."

"Don't talk o' that way, Maggie, or I shall think I've spoken roughly to ye."

"Well, ye make a body vexed, goin' on o' that way. Just as if I wasn't able to take care of myself. Why, I was eighteen last Whitsuntide, an' I'm an inch taller than mother when she holds herself at the straightest,

an' she promised father to wed him before she was my age. Ye're forgettin', Mattha; ye're just thinkin' I'm a bit of a child, same as I used to be. I can tell ye, I think myself a woman, an' feel like one too."

The irritable tone of Maggie's voice had increased.

"Yes, Maggie, I'm forgettin'; ye say true. It never came into my mind until to-night that you'd grown up to be a woman. But it only makes me feel that I must stand up an' take all the more care of ye." The strong man's voice was low and tender, and the expression of his face was full of gentleness as he turned it upon his sister. Then, as if he wished to end a fruitless discussion, he added, "I think ye'd better go in to mother now, for it's a long way past bedtime, an' tell her to leave the door on the latch, an' I'll be in before she has got the light put out."

Maggie rose from her seat, and treading carefully among the cinders, let herself down

from the raised hearthstone to the ground. She went as far as the door, and stood for a moment in a hesitating, an uncertain manner; then turned round and looked at her brother, who in the fading firelight was stooping over his pipe and shaking the ashes out of it against his knee. Should she go back and speak to him, she thought; should she try to make amends for the bitterness of her last words? Another minute and she stood beside the hearthstone, with face upturned, and the trembling movements of lip and chin with which a child seeks tearfully for pardon. "Mattha," she said, "I'm going to ask him to let me tell ye all about it. An' then ye willn't be angry with me any more, old chap?"

"That's my lass." And Matthew looked up from his pipe with a well-pleased expression on his face. "Them words are t' best ye've said yet." Then, seeing that her eyes were again filled with tears, he added hastily, "Ye've made me feel like another man; so

away wi' thee, an' get to bed as fast as ever ye can, an' we'll forget all about sweethearts till the mornin'."

When we have watched a child growing up to womanhood, the different periods of life, which in the abstract are definitely marked out, become, by reason of our close inspection and the continuity of our intercourse, so overlapped that we fail to distinguish the point at which infancy merges into childhood, childhood into girlhood, girlhood into womanhood. So it was with Matthew Tindale. His sister, born ten years after him, and who was at first a delicate plaything to be only looked at and admired, grew into a downy creature, which on Sundays might be carried into the fields outside Staneby, and be allowed to show her growing intelligence by suffering the daisy chain to hang uninjured round her neck, and by trying with weak baby hands to toss the cowslip balls back against his feet. And it was not until babyhood had passed into childhood

that the lad of seventeen started with the painfulness of the thought, that the little confiding creature who had gone so willingly anywhere if led by his hand, had for ever departed from him; the baby face, the cooing voice, the tiny hands which laid hold indiscriminately of any object that came near, were all vanished, as if the mist of intervening years had already risen and blurred the little figure which would now only toddle toward him in the dim perspective. The baby for whom he had learned to feel an idolatrous affection was gone irrevocably from him, and in its place a little maiden had slowly come; and, as the changing view of a magic picture, this tiny seven-year-old had taken the place of the dark-eyed kitten, which used to nestle in his bosom and der, der itself to sleep. He loved the little maiden, but not as he loved the baby-child. Then the child grew into girlhood, and he marked it not, thinking it was still the seven-year-old which prattled at his side. And so, when Maggie tasted of

that cup by which the cheek is flushed with the first approach of coming womanhood, Matthew had not noticed it, still believing her to be the little sister who had loved to bring her knitting to the forge, and, joining her treble voice to his deep tones, had learned to sing many a ballad without divining that it was heaven on earth when each Darby had won his Joan.

But to-night as he sat alone on the hearth-stone, the knowledge that she had assumed the distinctive individuality of womanhood came upon him, and he started back from the thought, as a man who, after combating only with physical dangers, shrinks when brought into contact with one which is incorporeal. Hitherto the guardianship which he had extended to his sister, made no further demands upon him than such as a muscular arm and tender thoughtfulness for her could supply. It had been easy for the tall strong youth to swing the little child upon his shoulder, and stride past the village tyrant,

whose outstretched wings and open beak threatened a too close proximity. Or, when the sun was beating with fierce rays, and the child had come to its favourite playground in front of the smithy door, to call it in and, seating it in a place of safety, to bid it watch the sparks that danced about like fairies so soon as he had struck the iron. How often, too, when she was weary with being indoors on the long wet autumn days, did he bring her into the forge, and opening a box full of assorted nails, place it beside the little sister on the bench, telling her to play with them until the big finger on his watch, which always hung upon the shutter, had reached a certain point, when he would not be surprised—so he always told her—if a peppermint were to fall from the roof into her lap. And how pretty were the movements on the part of the child: the little head lifted in expectation to the grimy roof, and then turned in glee upon the brother who, in the midst of his work, was always watchful of this little

sister; or babbling out some baby words of song, while in momentary forgetfulness of the expected gift, she would fix her attention upon the nails which she had turned out indiscriminately on the bench—and which patient Matthew would presently have to sort —and beat them with the palms of her fat hands. Or, wearying of this, she would look with wondering eyes at the watch, whose finger seemed to "walk" so slowly, and, pressing her rosy lips upon its face, would give it bubbling kisses and tell it to make haste and go on, faster; or, looking up at the roof with eyes full of contemplative gravity, and a mind with who can tell what strivings after definite thought, would sit motionless for several seconds, and then, turning to the place where her brother stood, would vociferate in baby accents for the "tumin'" of the promised peppermint.

These were the services which Matthew knew well how to render. But now that his sister stood on the borderland of womanhood,

it was as if she were going to slip beyond the reach of his protecting arm into a world whose modes of thought and action he did not understand—it never occurring to him that, by very reason of his manhood, and the knowledge and experience appertaining to it, he was peculiarly fitted to be her guardian.

CHAPTER III.

THE ASCHENBURGS, GUARDIAN AND WARD.

THE dining-room at Derthwaite was long and low-roofed, with black oak panellings on ceiling and walls, and heavy window draperies, from which at night the gloom was imperfectly dispelled by a single lamp that hung above the oval dining-table.

It was the same evening on which Abel had delayed the dinner-hour for her young master, and Mr. John Aschenburg, or Mr. Aschenburg as he was usually called, a cousin of the late owner of Derthwaite, was seated, its solitary occupant, with his chair turned a little away from the table, and his legs crossed upon the morocco seat of another.

He was a man of medium height, with a handsome face, in which the high arched nose and delicate though firmly closing mouth were the most marked features. His eyes were of that undefined colour which can neither be said to be blue nor grey; his complexion was slightly florid, his face closely shaven, while a profusion of white hair, thick, smooth, and silvery, covered his head. But for this white hair it would have been difficult to believe that he had counted all the forties, and was now in his fifty-sixth year, so comely was his person, so suggestive was every movement of the latent vitality which was yet stored within his frame. Perhaps, however, the expression upon his face would have borne testimony to the number of his years to an acute observer, for there was something in its placidity which belongs to the sunshine and stillness of an autumn day.

He was a man of few gestures; and, but to take the cigarette from his lips, or to raise a coffee cup from the table, he never moved his

hands, the one carelessly thrust between his waistcoat and shirt, the other lightly holding the back of the chair upon which his legs were crossed. Pre-eminently in tastes and habits a student, he sat during the first few minutes of real leisure which the day had offered, his thoughts busied with the work upon which he had been occupied. And yet he was smoking his cigarette with a manner of conscious enjoyment, throwing his head a little backward as each curl of smoke passed between his lips, and watching it melt into thin air.

But instead of the grey rolling curves, his eyes saw nothing but the pages of an open folio, mellowed to a soft dun colour by centuries, and having its broad margins written over with notes in a stiff, monkish hand. There the pen had slipped, and the most important word had been made illegible; and while Mr. Aschenburg seemed steadily to be watching a vanishing curl of smoke, he tried to decipher it, and went again and again over

the context as though there were hope of it yielding up its meaning. The dim-paged folio with its vellum back, melted away, and loose sheets of manuscript took its place—oblong sheets covered with thin writing, which crossed them in irregular lines, and with blots and erasures here and there. These sheets were numbered, the number very nearly approaching a thousand; and as Mr. Aschenburg considered the four figures that were thinly scratched upon one of the upper corners, he sighed deeply, and, taking the cigarette from his lips, looked fixedly across the darkened room, seeing nothing, however, not even those sheets of the beloved manuscript, nor the folio upon which he was making the commentaries that were being eagerly waited for.

The fatigue which overtakes the weary traveller who marks the milestone which tells him he is not yet half way to his desired goal, had fallen on him. A languor ran through his veins, and for a moment his mind became possessed by it, and was vacant of all thought.

Then he quickly collected himself, and, making some exclamation aloud, pushed away the chair upon which his legs had been crossed, with a resolute action, and, lifting up his coffee-cup, quickly swallowed its contents.

"A bad thing to look forward," said Mr. Aschenburg.

He had acquired this habit of speaking aloud through living the solitary life of a student; for when Dr. Aschenburg died and the unexpected duty of guardianship to the son who was then a minor had fallen upon him, he had but moved from his Hampshire cottage to Derthwaite, stipulating that but for the new duties which he would in no way endeavour to shirk, his life should in all other respects be allowed to remain the same.

"A bad thing to look forward," continued Mr. Aschenburg, soliloquizing; "one's mind gets weary regarding a long perspective. Not often I fall into such a mistake."

Here a slight noise in the hall attracted his attention. Some one appeared to be putting

down light objects, such as a fishing-rod and tackle, upon the great oak table, and then there came the faint sound of a tune being hummed with closed lips, then a quick firm step upon the polished floor, and the dining-room door was suddenly opened.

The cheeriness of some men's smile, the look of gladness in their eyes, is like the clasp of a warm hand or the glow which follows a draught of generous wine. Mr. Aschenburg was one of these men, and it was with such an expression that he turned under the light of the single lamp and faced the new-comer.

"My boy, you are late."

"Late, am I?" The words were carelessly spoken, as the young owner of Derthwaite, Sidney Aschenburg, came forward.

"Your mother has left the dining-room twenty minutes."

"Really!" By this time Sidney had reached the table, and drawing one of the chairs toward him, sat down. He was a fair specimen of a good-looking young Englishman,

with light hair curling in thick close masses, and eyes large and bright with the expression of alertness in them which belongs to rapidity of thought. The lower part of his face was sunburnt, making his forehead appear, by reason of the contrast, singularly white.

"I have been down to the river," he began, as though beguiled against his will into making an excuse. "It was horribly hot indoors."

The eyes of the elder man were fixed benignantly and with a half-amused expression upon the speaker; his steadily maintained position, one arm leaning upon the back of his chair, the fingers running lightly through his white hair and rumpling it, forming a strong contrast to the restless movements of his companion, who, after pushing aside one glass and then another on the table, had caught up a fork, and was seemingly intent upon balancing it across his finger.

"What were you doing? Fishing?"

There was a slight pause before Sidney replied, then he said—

"I had my fishing-rod with me, but did not make any use of it."

"There has been thunder about to-day. I should have thought it scarcely worth your while to have gone to the river."

"Oh, I don't know," and the fork going down at this moment with a clatter, Sidney threw himself somewhat suddenly back in his chair and wondered "whenever dinner would be coming."

"Do the servants know you are in?"

"I really cannot say." And Sidney gave a shrug of the shoulders expressive of indifference, and got up and rang the bell.

For the next half-hour a trifling kind of conversation was kept up between the two men; the weather was touched upon, the state of the crops, various bits of local gossip, until at length the servants leaving the room, Mr. Aschenburg squared himself round to the table, and, folding his hands, rested his arms upon it, thus turning his profile upon young Aschenburg. Like many who pass their

lives in the seclusion of their own study, he was always conscious of a difficulty in speaking upon a subject of any import, if he were compelled to fix his eyes on the face of the person addressed; the expression upon it, if sympathetic, confused him and distracted his thoughts; if stony and unmoved, his mind became paralysed beneath its influence.

Sidney saw the action and understood it, but it did not prevent him sugaring his strawberries with complete unconcern.

Mr. Aschenburg cleared his throat several times, and a cloud of thoughfulness settled on his eyes and brow. Then he said—

"Your mother tells me that you have given up all thoughts of going to Norway."

Sidney's indifference concerning anything that could be said by his mother or the man who until within the last few months had stood in the position of guardian to him, had kept even the idlest speculations as to what Mr. Aschenburg could possibly be going to say from his mind. So when the subject

of his trip to Norway was suddenly launched upon him he paused before replying, while he slowly placed a strawberry between the short white teeth that were visible beneath his upper lip and fair moustache. Then he answered quietly in the affirmative.

"I thought your plans were all made, and you were going to start the week after next."

Sidney raised his eyebrows before replying, then, with a little laugh, said, "They *were* made, it is true, but——" The sentence remained unfinished, and again the young man gave a careless shrug of indifference.

"I do not like this constant change and vacillation, Sidney." As the elder man spoke, the cloud which had settled upon the upper part of his face, spread to his mouth, and hardened its corners, and there was a touch of severity in his tone as he added the words, "Your moods are as changeable as the wind, and you entirely subject yourself to them."

"Moods are nature's winds and tempests; they keep us from stagnation."

"My dear boy, depend upon it, if moods are nature's winds and tempests, they also are the powers that, being uncontrolled, work ruin. If you suffer yourself to be governed by your moods, you will awaken some morning to find yourself undone."

"You take a trifling matter very seriously. Why should I not give up the idea of going to Norway if, after making arrangements for it, the idea palls upon me?"

"It is not this particular change in your plans of which I especially complain; it is of the habit that is growing upon you and which creeps into everything."

It was not the first time Sidney Aschenburg had had to listen to expostulations upon this subject from his guardian; but he sat unconcernedly enough, tossing over his strawberries, while a slight smile played about his mouth.

There was a pause of several seconds, and

then Mr. Aschenburg, with the touch of asperity gone from his voice and manner, said, "Think well before you come to a decision upon anything; but, having come to it, stick to it—unless, of course, there is some absolutely good reason for change." Then, as if he felt he had been speaking with undue harshness, he turned for the first time to the young man, the old kindly smile in his eyes, saying, "And now, my boy, go to Norway and have a pleasant trip, and let us forget there was any talk of change."

For the first time the unconcern depicted on Sidney's face gave way, and he looked at the elder man resolutely, his straight eyebrows knitting themselves, and the mobile mouth stiffening in a haughty determined way.

"You have been tutoring me to be resolute, therefore I need not apologize if I say once and for all that I shall not go to Norway."

Mr. Aschenburg did not change his position, but kept his arms on the table and leant over

them, his face with its benevolent expression turned upon his companion.

"I am determined to stay at Derthwaite through the summer months at least."

Mr. Aschenburg did not immediately reply. He seemed to be debating with himself on some point. Then reluctantly, and as though he were trying to find a reason which should be an excuse in his eyes for Sidney's sudden determination to remain at Derthwaite, he said, "At any rate it will please your mother."

Again the expression upon the young man's face changed; the brilliant eyes became gradually clouded, the mouth relaxed, and he tugged at his short fair moustache in a perturbed manner.

"Your mother is fond of Derthwaite," continued Mr. Aschenburg, trying to forget that it was the "love of change," which he never lost an opportunity of condemning, which, as he believed, was detaining the young man.

Still Sidney made no answer, looking straight however into Mr. Aschenburg's face.

"She always hoped that when you left college, and had had a year's freedom abroad, that you would be content to settle down here. You have a good income and a good estate, and nothing in the world to do but find an occupation for yourself and keep to it." To Mr. Aschenburg, with his scholarly instincts, this seemed one of the easiest of things. "Besides," he went on, speaking from a sudden impulse, "you have come of age, and I sadly want you to take the management of affairs into your own hands. You know, Sidney, that practically, though much against my will, I am still master here."

The elder man was noticing, with a certain feeling of satisfaction, the signs of uneasiness in the younger one's face and manner, believing as he did that they were evidences of unusual consideration and thought, and he went on—

"If you could bring yourself into settling six months in the year at Derthwaite——"

"Oh, pray do not harp on that everlasting

subject," interrupted Sidney. "Derthwaite is very rarely endurable."

"You seem to have been able to amuse yourself here for the past two months, although for the greater part of that time your mother and I were in town."

"Oh, well"—and for a moment Sidney was embarrassed—"the fishing, you know, was good."

"I thought you had been working chiefly on your cantata."

"No; I have thrown that up long since."

Mr. Aschenburg did what was unusual with him, and began playing a tattoo lightly with the fingers of one hand upon the table. He was perplexed; and it was not until several minutes had elapsed that he spoke again.

"With one thing I am satisfied—you seem inclined to stay at Derthwaite. That of course is very desirable, for it is a bad thing for a young man, the owner of property, to think that any place is to be preferred to his own. Still, I would rather you were staying from

some commendable motive, than from the shilly-shallying kind of rule which guides you."

The young man had drawn a silver basket of dried fruit to him, and was tossing over first one then another with a fork, his face held in a sufficiently stooping posture for no light from the lamp to fall on it, saving where it touched the upper part of the forehead and the fair hair. But when the last words fell from Mr. Aschenburg, Sidney started, and looked with a keen glance at his guardian. What did he mean by such a remark? he asked himself. What had he heard?

"You know, Sidney, how I am for ever trying to combat that spirit of change which you constantly betray, whether in intellectual pursuits or in the most ordinary employments. The cup of one intellectual pleasure seems to be no sooner raised to your lips, than another diverts your attention; music, painting, literature, each is taken up

by you in turn, to be laid aside for the veriest thistle-down which floats on the summer air. And so with the more serious matters of life."

Mr. Aschenburg stopped abruptly. He had been tempted to pursue his subject by the quick earnest glance which had been turned upon him by his companion, but it gradually relaxing, and the expression of careless indifference, which was the one most commonly seen on the young squire's handsome face, again settling upon it, the flow of the elder man's thoughts had been effectually checked. He could not know that his words had brought a feeling of relief to Sidney, testifying as they did that the remark, which to the young man had been charged with a double meaning, was innocent enough; to him, Sidney's mood of thoughtfulness had passed away, and therefore the moment favourable for making some impression upon him was gone.

The two men were silent for a little time. The younger one had refused a proffered

cigarette, and now leaned back in his chair, the full light of the lamp shining on his upturned face. He was not looking at his companion, but into the darkness at the further end of the room, his eyelids drooping, while the play of pleasant thought was clearly distinguishable in a faint smile that flitted ever and anon across his lips.

"By Jove!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Aschenburg. He had drawn out his watch, and this exclamation was due to his discovery of the lateness of the hour, and to his having remembered his promise to play a game of chess with Mrs. Aschenburg. "Your mother will have grown tired of waiting for me. Are you not ready to come?"

"What in my morning coat?" And Sidney held out an arm covered with light grey tweed toward his companion, while he laughed lightly. "You know my mother demands obedience to all the bye-laws of society."

"And possibly she is right, Sidney."

"Quite so." And again the young man

laughed; but this time there was a slight touch of mockery in his tone.

Mr. Aschenburg had risen from his chair, and had paused for a moment, looking down at Sidney. He marked the tone in which the words were said, and it jarred upon him. But there was nothing in the expression of the pleasant young English face lifted up to meet his gaze to carry out the feeling of discordancy, and so, with something like self-reproach, the elder man nodded kindly, and with erect figure and head held stiffly, prepared to leave the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRYSTING-PLACE.

On the Derthwaite side of the Devil's Pot a wood of oak, larches, and pine covers a considerable portion of the land that rises gradually eastward toward the Crossfell range of hills. No one ever walks in it. A fisherman's path runs close to the river at the top of the gorge, but the clumps of fern by which it is bordered, the long trailers of bramble, the close growth of the enchanter's nightshade, are never pushed aside. There would be no break in the wood but for the cart-road that winds by a circuitous path to a quarry which supplied stone for the building of Derthwaite; but even this has fallen into

disuse, for instead of the long deep wheel tracks that once held water enough to reflect the autumn skies are seen bands of moss, thick and velvety, and a short green sward where the toiling horses once scooped out a hollow with their hoofs. The grass has crept over the floor of the quarry, and foxgloves are growing on its sloping sides, and where the rocks have been rudely torn asunder, ferns uncurl themselves, opening their fronds and rearing up delicate stems undisturbed.

In the golden light of a waning afternoon might be seen the figure of a girl going through the undergrowth of the wood, her skirts carefully drawn round her as she pushed through the tall brackens, her hand catching the ends of the mountain ash twigs and holding them back as she passed. There was no hesitation shown in her way of walking, no doubtfulness in her manner as to the direction which her steps should take, and it was only when she came within a few paces from the broken edge of the quarry,

that she walked more slowly and cast swift glances to the right and left.

A chiff chaff was disturbed by the rustling of her dress upon the grass and flew across the open, and a rabbit ran hastily to its burrow. The girl stopped and with bent head stood listening. But no sound broke the stillness, saving the hum of a bee, and, in a distant part of the wood, the cooing of pigeons. She walked where the grass had become a little shorter and where a path was beginning to be worn by her own feet, until she came to the entrance of the quarry, and there, on a stone from which the marks of the workmen's tools had been effaced by long exposure to frost and rain, she seated herself, folding her hands one over the other in her lap.

The expression upon her face was full of quiet tenderness. She was marking none of the shadows, seeing none of the deep clefts and ravines which lie between the threshold of girlhood and womanhood's far horizon. No

heavy night dews of sorrow had fallen upon her young spirit. As yet she stood in the full rays of the morning sun, her face up-lifted in expectation of its meridian splendour, her pulses beating with the fulness, the joyousness, the buoyancy of life's opening tide, and its wonderment at what the summer would bring. It seemed to her that in the time of June, roses, clematis, and eglantine would pour out their glory at her feet; and the breezes which would refresh her cheek would come laden with the scent of a thousand flowers, and life, with all its wealth of love and honour and deep-seated joy, would clothe her in its rapturous robe. To her the autumn was far off, the winter was beyond her ken. It was only the summer which occupied her thoughts, for the fragrance of the tender blossoms of the spring had failed to reach her, and she did not see their beauty as they lay in the hollows at her feet. It is only when we tread amid the rustling leaves of autumn, that spring-time looks fair and beautiful and we would

fain recall the freshness of its morning air, and the delicate transparency of its rays of light. When we have borne the heat and burden of the day, when our feet have trodden the winepress of sorrow and our garments are stained with the purple juice of the grape, when the winter is coming upon us and snow and icicles are in the land, then, and not until then, do our eyes turn back with an expression of weary longing to the days in which the grey woodlands showed their first tinge of green, and the brown earth tossed the flowers that are thornless upon our path.

It seemed as if no sign from the outer world could have power to reach her; the mind had dropped back from keeping watch upon the portals of the senses, and the beautiful drooping figure could neither see nor hear. But while the mind is absent the heart is on the watch. The mother weary with long nursing sinks into the slumber of exhausted nature, never doubting that the faintest cry of her infant can bring her from the farthest bound-

aries of that land which the mind can haunt in sleep. And so with the woman who waits at the trysting-place for her lover. No need for her to bend attentive ear windward to catch the first sound of his approaching steps. The swaying of a distant bough held back, the snap of a twig beneath the feet, the roll of a pebble will be enough to rouse her from the deepest thought and tell her that he comes.

Suddenly the girl started up, her head erect, her eyes widely opened and her lips parted, while the colour rushed over her cheeks and neck.

There was the sound of some one treading through the heather, the words of an old ballad sung by a tenor voice, the rustling of dry leaves, the breaking of twigs, and in a few minutes Sidney Aschenburg appeared, smiling and waving his hand to the girl who stood below. Then he sprang lightly over the edge, running down the first few yards of sliding rubbish, and, catching hold of the branches of a birch tree, swung himself over

a bit of rock, after which he leaped from shelf to shelf, from stone to stone, until he reached the floor of the quarry.

"Well, Maggie—so you found time to come." He spoke in a tender, half-reproachful tone, and laid his hands lightly on the girl's shoulders as her eyes were raised with an air of diffidence to his.

"I came because I promised."

He stooped and kissed the tip of the little delicate ear, and she raised her hands tremulously to his where they lay on her shoulders; while he, seeing her movements, slipped his own from their resting-place and put them under the roughened palms.

"You came because you promised? Surely you will always come."

Maggie did not answer, her thoughts going back to the promise made to Matthew three nights before. Then as if an impulse prompted her to free herself from some impalpable bond, she took her hands from under his and silently stepped away from him.

Sidney dropped back a pace or two, and after tilting his hat so that its brim would intercept the rays of the sun that fell slantingly between the pine trees, he leaned his shoulders against a projecting portion of the quarry wall, an amused expression settling on his face, as he stood quietly watching Maggie, and waiting for her to speak.

She had seated herself upon a stone that was lying near, and was plucking and smoothing alternately the moss that grew over it. Her head was turned away from her companion, her eyes fixed with a troubled expression upon some tall foxgloves that were growing at the opposite side of the quarry. Presently, however, she looked round, but on seeing the amused look on Sidney's face her eyes fell, though she began to say the sentences she had planned.

"I would like to tell Mattha that I come to see you here; it would make it far easier, and I should feel far more as if I was doin' right."

"You foolish pet! What good would it

do?" And the faintest shade of annoyance came into Sidney Aschenburg's face.

"I know Mattha would like it, sir."

"Goosey." And the young man threw a rose-bud that he had in his button-hole, playfully against the girl's cheek.

"He wouldn't tell it, sir, if you didn't wish." Maggie's fingers were here raised abstractedly to the place where the rose-bud had touched her, and her eyes were lifted pleadingly to her companion's face.

"Would he not tell it!" And Sidney gave a laugh that had something of mockery and something of annoyance in it.

"I would ask him to keep it a secret. An' he's a man that never breaks his word."

"He would only pretend to promise."

"I can get Mattha to do very near anything for me. I could ask him, an' I know he would do all that ever he said."

"Go on, little pleader! What next!" And the speaker broke off a small portion of

the rose twig which he held in his hand, and threw it down upon the upturned face.

"Willn't you let me, sir?"

Sidney moved lazily from the quarry wall, and, putting the tips of his fingers under Maggie's chin, looked down at her with a flickering kind of light in his eyes, a light that was in part due to admiration, in part to a slight feeling of vexation that Maggie should press the matter.

"Please, sir."

"Nonsense. Surely it cannot matter who knows of our meetings here."

"It is just because it doesn't matter that I want to tell." Maggie spoke eagerly, feeling she had gained a momentary advantage.

But Sidney did not answer, only stooped down and lightly touched her cheek with his lips. Then he went back to his old position beside the quarry wall.

The flush which Sidney's kiss had brought spread like the delicate pink lining of a shell over Maggie's cheek as she sat watching him,

her lips parted and her eyes widely opened with an expression of wistfulness.

The young man stood looking down at her as he smoothed his moustache with the finger of one hand. She was very beautiful, and he wondered idly to himself how far the soft narcotic effect of her presence, which he felt stealing over him, might be akin to love? Then his thoughts ran confusedly backward through the past two months; to that evening when he had found her endeavouring to dig up a fern root in the path just above the Devil's Pot, and when through shyness and surprise she had overturned the contents of her basket in standing up to curtsey to him as he passed. Like the breath of violets came the recollection of the first services he had rendered her; the gathering up of the fern roots, and the slinging of the basket over her outstretched arm. Then he pictured her on their second meeting, when after loitering about in the village lane in hope of seeing the rustic beauty who had grown up, as it seemed

to him suddenly, from a pretty child into a lovely woman, and whom he had discovered that previous evening in the Derthwaite woods, she had unexpectedly come round the turning in the lane, and had flushed prettily upon finding that he stopped to speak to her. And then there were recollections of meetings that were scarcely accidental; and then of others that were distinctly planned.

It was for this girl, and in order to gratify the passing fancy of the hour, that he had told Mr. Aschenburg that his trip to Norway was to be abandoned. So much Sidney had admitted to himself, but with characteristic unconcern had never attempted to carry the self-examination further. He knew that for the past two months Derthwaite had been made attractive to him by the piquancy given to meetings which were brought about at first by observing Maggie's comings and goings, and later, when these meetings were established, by the novelty of playing lover to a girl who, while possessed of great beauty, yet

appeared innocent of all coquettish wiles. However, as he stood against the sandstone rock looking down at Maggie, he asked himself whether he were really falling in love with her? He was giving no anxious consideration, it is true, to the question, but still the idea was there. He remembered how he had told the girl a score of times that he loved her. He, however, believed the words to have been idle. He had been amused and attracted by her as with some quaint and lovely toy; and as a man he had been moved by her beauty, but nothing beyond—at least so he thought. And yet it seemed to him, as he stood there dallying idly with this question, that a mesh had been woven round him, each thread a silken bond, which though yielding to every touch, and seemingly elastic enough to allow him to go to the farthest ends of the earth, yet held him bound to this simple village girl. The feeling was pleasant, and Sidney Aschenburg yielded himself unresistingly to it, no thoughts of

the future or possible consequences troubling his mind.

His eyes were still resting on Maggie, but all traces of the annoyance which had been visible when the girl was vainly attempting to win an assent from him that she should take Matthew into her confidence, had vanished. An expression of thoughtfulness had come into his face, and his glance which at first had been of a light shifting kind had become fixed and searching.

"Maggie," he presently began, "tell me why you always address me as 'sir'?"

The girl dropped her eyes with a look of disappointment; she had hoped he had been going to tell her that Matthew might know how she and Sidney Aschenburg met once, and sometimes twice a week in the quarry wood, and it was a second or two before she seemed to understand the question that had been put to her. But even then she did not reply, only began shyly to fold the pleats of her dress.

"You ought to call me something less formal. Suppose you try how 'Sidney' sounds?"

The girl trembled a little; but it was at something which was new to her in the tone of his voice, and the faint colour went in fitful waves across her cheeks.

"Come, let me hear you say it."

"Oh no, I cannot. It would be a liberty." And Maggie glanced up at him, looking shy and frightened.

"Do not look at me so reproachfully. Come."

"I would rather not say it, please, sir. It helps me to keep in mind a lot o' things which sometimes I'm afraid o' forgettin'." Here she turned her head away, and again looked across the quarry at the tall foxgloves, while she added hesitatingly, "Ye see, sir, I feel as if I must always bear in mind the difference between me an' you in our stations. It seems like a kind o' Bible to hold by."

Sidney raised himself once more from the

quarry wall, and, crossing the few paces of ground between himself and Maggie, seated himself beside her on the short grass. Then he said, with a fixed eager expression in his eyes which was new to them, "Love makes us equal."

"Yes, sir; love makes us equal; but there's a lot o' things beside love in this world." And Maggie turned to him in sudden wistfulness, as a gleam of knowledge opened upon her with the words.

Sidney put out his hand, to take hold of Maggie's, which was just within his reach, his eyebrows drawn slightly together, and a glow of colour deepening the sunburn on his cheek.

"You do not love me, Maggie," he began passionately, "you do not care how you torment me. You think that I will come, and come, and come to meet you, although you are telling me all the while that you may have changed your mind, and will not be here. You think that no matter what you say to me, or how you treat me——"

But he was interrupted in this sudden outburst, for Maggie, after looking at him for some few minutes, uttered a low cry of distress, and, stooping, laid her forehead upon his hand. Then in an instant she sprang to her feet, and, standing in front of him at the distance of some yards, began speaking quickly, her breath coming in short gasps.

"You hurt me very badly, Mr. Aschenburg, when you talk like that. I love you—you know that, sir; I have told you more than once. But I cannot bear—I cannot, *cannot* bear you to tell me to my face that I do not love you, and that I torment you. Oh, please, sir, please, Mr. Aschenburg, you must not do it—I feel as if it would kill me."

Sidney sprang hastily to his feet and went toward her.

She did not shrink away, but looked up at him with the expression which a dog that has been wounded by the hand of its master will give in the first moments of its pain.

It was too much; he must have been made of adamant to have resisted its dumb appeal.

His arm slipped round her tenderly, gently tightening its hold, until it had drawn her against his breast. Then, seeing that her eyes were dim with unshed tears, he stooped down and kissed the white lids, murmuring that she was his own darling, and that it grieved him to think he had caused her pain. And then he stooped lower and kissed her lips.

The two stood motionless and silent; all thought was stopped, sunshine and zephyrs floated over them, and for a moment they lived in fantasy.

How quickly are we brought back from the flowery fields of Arcadia, and how readily are its balmy airs and floating cloudlands carried away!

Maggie lifted her head from its resting-place, and as she drew herself from the encircling arms, a feeling of annoyance and discomfort took possession of Sidney.

"I really must be getting home," he said,

with awkward abruptness. "My mother grumbles dreadfully at me for keeping dinner waiting so many times. You will come next week and talk nonsensical nothings with me. Good-bye." At that moment Sidney wished Maggie to understand that all that he said to her, their very meetings in fact, were only nonsense.

He took her hand and tried to smile naturally. Maggie looked at him without speaking, her eyes full of wistfulness. This wistfulness smote him, so he passed the tips of his fingers down the ivory cheek and said "good-bye" again.

"You are not angry with me, sir?"

"Angry, my pretty!" He bent quickly and kissed her cheek. How could he help it. His heart could not harden itself like that of the Egyptian king. Besides, this fair-faced girl, tall and beautiful as an annunciation lily, had stepped into it. Still there was no charge to be laid against her: it was he who had sought and wooed.

"I think I must go, Maggie," he said again.

"Yes, sir, you must not be late." The girl dropped a curtsey, as with a blush and shy smile she turned away from him, and began to pick her way carefully among the broken stones.

Sydney stepped hastily through the brackens as he went through the wood, the uncomfortable sensations which follow in the train of an indiscretion, dogging his heels. He would give up meeting Maggie; he was certain he was falling in love with her, and then where would he be? He was dissatisfied with himself, angry, mortified. What must he do? Go off to Norway as he had intended? No, that would look too much like running away. Should he tell Maggie that these meetings had better be given up; that if the fact of her meeting him in the quarry wood got to be known in the village she might be hardly judged, and the neighbours might begin to say unkind things about her. He could point out that even if the seclusion

of the place seemed to promise freedom from intrusion, yet her going and coming might be noticed, and some prying persons might be led by curiosity to track her down. He certainly could say this to her, and it would seem a reasonable and sufficient excuse for the breaking off of their intimacy.

Sidney began to slash the tops of the brackens in passing with his stick. Never before had he looked at the matter so steadily; it seemed almost to him at that moment as if for the last two minutes he had been labouring under a fit of insanity. He had made an awful fool of himself, he ejaculated with each slash of his stick; he had been led into a dunder-pate's trick; but he would make an end of it all, he would come to an explanation. It was as if with strong hand he determined to turn the bow of the boat up stream in which he had been idly floating, and resolutely cut his way from a vortex of swirling waters. He had been deceiving himself with the tawdry gilt of sentiment. It was foolish,

ridiculous; romance would not do in every-day life. Suppose after all Maggie went and told her brother, and that great lumbering fool of a blacksmith chose to levy a tax upon the escapade? At this thought Sidney's square, well-built shoulders twisted with uneasiness. What a fool he had been, and he struck an oak sapling viciously.

The next thing would be that it would get to the hearing of men of his own set—pompous old justices who sat on the magistrates' bench, and younger men who spent their time in idle gossip. What delectation would be afforded to them by such a piece of scandal. Sidney Aschenburg of Derthwaite, the artistic, the fastidious, the dainty, carrying on a flirtation with a blacksmith's daughter.

There was but one thing to do. The whole business must be given up. And because the weeks without a glimpse of Maggie's face would drag wearily, it would perhaps be better to get away from Derthwaite. It would be easier. Yes, he would really do

it. He would tell Maggie he was going to Norway. This would point incontestably to the fact that they could meet no longer, and thus no explanation would be required.

As Sidney came to this determination he slackened speed, and, lifting up his hat, took a deep breath. He was as a man who accredits himself with strength, and who is yet doubtful of his own sufficiency: his heart had mirrored so often in imagination that queenly child of the people, that perhaps it would turn in rebellion against him and refuse that she should be cast out.

And so Sidney went home perturbed and pondering.

CHAPTER V.

SIDNEY REFLECTS.

BEFORE ten o'clock the next day there had been a steady fall of rain, and the footpaths in the Derthwaite gardens and the broad gravelled terrace were sodden, wet, and glistening; the petals of the roses were soaked and hung heavily on their stems, and all the low-growing plants had been cruelly tossed about and splashed with the wet soil. It was not a morning in which persistently troubled thoughts were to be unmovingly endured, and so Sidney Aschenburg found as he stood with his hands in his pockets looking out at the rain.

The room, in part studio, in part a recep-

tacle for curios which was devoted to his use, was in the north wing, and had three windows overlooking a path that led on the one hand to the terrace, on the other to the stables. It was a pleasant room, shady and cool in the hot summer mornings, and, when the afternoon sun came round, filled with sunshine tempered by the foliage of some oak trees that stood within a stone's throw of the windows. Fireplaces with carved oak mantelpieces were fitted into each end of the room, and a heavy crimson curtain hung from the ceiling for the purpose of dividing it when the weather was cold; but in the summer months, or when the autumn sunshine was yet warm, they were looped back against the walls. A curious medley of furniture filled it, for the most part pushed against the walls irrespective of order and of the chances of conveniently reaching it when wanted: a grand piano; near it several chairs piled with loose music, bound volumes being heaped together on the floor; easels bearing unfinished can-

vases of different sizes; a lay figure clothed in a suit of Spanish armour of the fifteenth century; several handsomely carved chairs upholstered in faded tapestry; a large number of gilt frames, propped either against the walls, or against some of the various articles of furniture; carved dower chests holding bits of tapestry valuable for art purposes; shelves stretching across one end of the room that bent beneath the weight of a large collection of Indian brass-work; cabinets closely packed with Roman mosaics, rare cameos and corals worked up into artistic shapes; bookcases, whose depth proclaimed the fact that a double row of volumes were stored upon the shelves; and two cupboards fitted into the wall, containing old silver and all sorts of odds and ends.

The young squire stood looking gloomily at the dripping leaves of the oaks, while he caught the longer hairs of his moustache between his lips, and fretted with them. He was watched by a young Gordon setter, the

animal whimpering occasionally and lifting up a fore-paw, with which, however, she did not dare to touch her master. Presently he looked round, and the dog leaped up in vain endeavours to reach his hand.

"Confound you, Juno; like the rest of your sex, you worry one past endurance. Go and lie down." And Sidney began to pace to and fro in the clear space that was left in the centre of the room, while the dog crouched to one of the fireplaces and stretched herself upon the rug, her delicate nose between her fore-paws, her eyes alert and following the young squire's movements.

Sidney found it much easier on the previous evening to arrive at a sort of half decision that he would yet change his mind and go to Norway, than with the softening influence of a few hours lying upon the memory of his last meeting with Maggie. That sudden impulse which had prompted him to take her in his arms had somehow begun to dwarf its proportions and look less formidable. He had

spoken heedlessly to her and made her weep. What course, therefore, he argued with himself, had been left but the one of giving comfort? He could not have stood by and contented himself with saying a few platitudes; he could not have made her grief a subject for jesting, and driven away her tears with badinage. Oh no! He had erred insomuch as he had pained her by his remarks; but having pained her, he was bound to do what he could to make amends. That was clear enough.

Nevertheless, as often as Sidney arrived at this conclusion—and he arrived at it many times—he was surprised to find that there still clung about him a certain feeling of uneasiness from which he could not be rid. He was annoyed with himself, harassed, vexed, without being able, as he considered, to assign a sufficient cause.

He would go in thought farther back still. He tried to recall his feelings as he stood with his shoulders leaning against the quarry wall,

looking at Maggie as she sat on the sloping ground below him. He had been taking note of her beauty, and drinking it in like a slowly intoxicating draught. Then he remembered how he had tried to get her to call him by his Christian name; and that when she refused, he had left the side of the quarry, and without knowing why he had said it—without even now being able to understand how the words came to his lips—he had told her that love made them equal. And then, somehow, those other words had followed, which were surely at the root of all that was harassing and vexing him. He remembered exactly what he had said—how many times in the night had he not recalled the words, and as often had turned restlessly upon his pillow? He had accused her of not loving him, and of believing that he would come again and again to meet her, no matter what she said to him. What could have prompted those words? He had never doubted that Maggie was fond of him, had never doubted the tender gentleness

of her submission. Try, however, as he would, he could get at the remembrance of no clear thought in his mind by which they had been prompted. Something seemed to have drifted him away in a strong tide of emotion. He could get hold of nothing distinctly; all was vague; a power, huge, irresistible, overwhelming, had carried him away on its flood.

But as for falling in love with her—why, the idea was preposterous! To fall in love with her was a very different affair from flirting with her. To fall in love with a pretty girl of his own station would only have been like the breaking of a sunny day over the land. The gods would have been sure to compass the favourable working of events, and no obstacle would have stood between himself and marriage. But with Maggie the thing was very different. He certainly would have to shake himself free from such an incubus as love for a blacksmith's daughter. Maggie in the quarry, with a simple setting

of moss-grown rocks and ferns, looked very lovely and graceful; but translated to Derthwaite, he was doubtful whether her shyness and awkwardness would not prove unmanageable, and whether her rustic ways would not vex him beyond endurance. Besides, he must remember her relations. He could not have that bright-eyed, stooping old blacksmith coming to dine with him, nor the younger one for the matter of that. And then there was the mother with her hands set upon her hips, and her great moon-face—so at least Sidney described it to himself—wrinkled with smiles. No, confound it all! he certainly could not stand it.

Sidney worked himself into a fever of irritable impatience. He would take care that matters went no farther. He would write her a note telling her that the pleasant little meetings they had had must be discontinued for various reasons. No, that plan would never do. It would set Maggie up in arms, and she would tell the whole village,

and the letter would be as a witness to the truth of anything she might choose to say against him. Oh no; he would just take matters quietly, and wait until next Wednesday—or Thursday, was it not? No, Wednesday. Sidney was rather pleased that for a moment he had forgotten which day had been fixed for their next meeting; it seemed like an assurance outside of himself that, in the main, he really cared very little for Maggie. He would wait, and then tell her how like a silly boy and girl they had acted, and that it was better they should have nothing more to say to each other; or, that he had been taking considerable thought about what the neighbours might be likely to say if they got to know that she came to meet him in the quarry wood, and that as nothing, of course, could ever really come of these meetings—— No, that would not do. He had better tell her at once that he was afraid, instead of making love in jest, they might awaken some day to find that it had become love in earnest. No,

hang it all, he could not say that. How absurd he would look.

Here Sidney paused in his walking and stopped in front of the rug upon which Juno was lying. The dog gave very gentle movements with her tail, while she lifted her head wistfully—she dared not jump up to greet her well-beloved, for the sternness of his voice when he had last spoken yet filled her with apprehension and trembling. Dog-nature is very full of forgiveness, and if Sidney had but looked at Juno kindly, she would have crawled along the floor and have licked his feet. But instead of this he turned away and threw himself into a deep lounge chair, his hands stretched up and clasped behind his head, while he looked moodily at the opposite wall; and so the movements of Juno's tail gradually ceased, her ears fell, and with a sigh her head drooped until it nestled upon her paws; but she did not for a moment take her eyes from her master's face. Only a minute, however, had she been in this position when a slight sardonic laugh sounded

through the room, and her comely black and tan form quivered with expectation. Was he going to call her to his side after all? Was he going to forgive her for having stepped up unbidden to him? But, although she watched him attentively, there were no signs of relenting.

Try as he would, Sidney could not decide upon a course of action. He was like a beech leaf in autumn which flutters in obedience to every breeze. No sooner had he fixed his mind on the probable consequences of continuing to meet Maggie than he refused to believe that she had any particular attractions for him, or that there was any need to put an end to the intimacy. Then, when the remembrance of that speech which had been followed by such annoying consequences came upon him, he fretted and winced, doubting whether in truth he were wholly indifferent, and wondering whether it would not be more prudent to bring the affair to a summary end. Everything, confound it, had played into his hands

and duped him. It seemed as if circumstances had positively been endowed with sense, and arrayed themselves against him in secret hostility.

Sidney lay back in his chair, staring at the cornice. What should he do?

His shoulders moved uneasily. Had he not thought of half a dozen plans, nay, rather fifteen, twenty, and not one had commended itself to him? Besides, he did not really want to rid himself of her, not exactly, not altogether. He would have liked to have seen her a few times, for Derthwaite was a beastly hole, and not a soul would be coming to it for some weeks. Of course he did not want to marry her. That was all foolery and nonsense. But surely he could have a little flirtation with her. Flirtations were carried on in his own position without any thoughts of marriage. Why not, therefore, between himself and a blacksmith's daughter?

Here Sidney raised himself in his chair and looked out to see if it still rained. He was

going to get a confounded head if he went on thinking in this manner. The best thing would be for him to go and order Harkaway to be saddled, and have a gallop toward the fells.

A stretch of his arms above his head, while the low humming of a song with closed lips broke into a subdued tenor, and then he rose to his feet and prepared to leave the room, Juno watching her opportunity to slink unbidden and unnoticed behind him down the corridor. And as he strode along, the words of the old ditty, "Begone, dull care," became clearer and more easily distinguished as they fell from his lips, until, coming to the side-door opening on the path leading from the terrace to the stable, they rang out joyously in a burst of song. A frivolous way, perhaps, of dealing with a burden of thought, nevertheless Sidney considered himself to be full of serious deliberation. He was naturally thoughtless, and he found himself being made to think in a very unusual manner, and though

the thinking itself was irksome enough, the idea that he had been doing such a thing was rather pleasurable. A feeling of complacency stirred his young blood at the idea that he was taking the reins of circumstances into his own hands, with the determination of driving the team into whatever road should seem best. It was not possible for Sidney Aschenburg to do any dastardly or cruel act. "No, by Jove, if I cut off any one's hand it will most certainly be my own." But then, unfortunately, even if it is one's own hand that is cut off, we entail upon those around us such a train of endless services, that even if their hands are left intact, their heads and hearts are wounded. Sidney was generous and kind-hearted; but then he never drew any pictures of the future, never tried to work out the simplest laws of cause and effect. For him nature was always to interfere and break her own laws, and he actually acted as though under the belief that if he fell, the hard rocks would be deprived of the qualities that would bruise him, and that

if he put his hand into a flame it would not be burned. He was made of the kind of stuff which fills the ranks with good soldiers; bullets might fly, but they would not carry death to him; the order might be given that would lead him to a cannon's mouth—no matter, *his* life was charmed. Good qualities and noble in the soldier, this utter disregard of things, but brought to bear on the common affairs of life it is liable to work an evil that is widespread.

It was about eleven o'clock, the rain had ceased, and the sun was beginning to struggle through the breaking clouds, and a pleasant smell of warm damp grass and earth filled the air. To get out of the house on such a morning when one has been a prey to annoying thoughts, and into the open air where the brightening clouds have a better chance of displaying their illuminating powers, and where every raindrop has its own little reflected patch of brightening sky, has a cheering effect upon a man's spirits. The

very way in which the gravel grated under Sidney's feet had something exhilarating in it; and he broke off abruptly in the refrain of his song, and began whistling in a fashion that was meant to be mollifying to canine ears, and even went so far as to snap his fingers in sign of forgiveness at Juno, and to allow her to leap about his feet.

Old Timothy was the first object that met Sidney's eyes as he entered the stable-yard, his round face good-humoured and rosy, his braces hanging over his hips, his checked shirt in loose folds, and between his hands a curb chain that jingled delightful music to Sidney's ears as it was rubbed and polished. He liked this old fellow, who was always full of cheery modes of thought.

"Is the rain off, Timothy?"

"Ay, sure enough, if ye're wanting to go riding," returned the old groom, with the jovial air of one who can rule both circumstances and weather.

"Then saddle Harkaway for me. And

look here, if you are quick, I'll get on in the yard."

Now, if there was one thing old Timothy loved more than another, it was to see his young master mount at the stables. For then he was not obliged, after holding the stirrup, to turn away as he knew he must do when in front of the windows at Derthwaite, but could stand with his bowed legs apart, and his hands on his hips or akimbo, just as was at the moment comfortable to him. And he could open his wide mouth in smiles, and even wink at the stable boys, in approval of his young master's seat. Old Timothy was very proud of Sidney Aschenburg's horsemanship, and was fond of pluming himself on the fact that it was he who had shown the boy how to hold his reins, and sit securely on his Shetland pony. So he went with great alacrity to do his bidding.

In an incredibly short time there was a sharp ringing of horse's hoofs, and a bright bay with black points allowed herself to be

led with a momentary curbing of her spirit through the stable-door. Then there was much dancing round and curvetting, and tossing up of a short thin mane, until at last Sidney was allowed a fleeting caress upon the trembling, delicate nostrils. One or two more coquettish turns, and "Who-hos" from old Timothy, and the pretty creature came to a momentary standstill, and Sidney was in the saddle, and being carried with little side-long bounds across the courtyard.

By the time the sun had shaken himself free from the clouds, the young squire was galloping up the road that leads to Seatenner Fell. There is nothing like a gallop when one is young and strong for shaking off cobwebs, especially if the road one takes be broad and open, with scrubby hedges on either side, and long level stretches of country that have scarcely a tree to break the keenness of the mountain breeze. And if the road be a little on the incline, it is all the better, providing of course that one's horse be fresh and full of

courage; for then the increased stoop of head and shoulders makes us feel that we are doing battle against legions of the air, and our spirits rise with each conquering elastic bound of the living arch beneath us.

Therefore, when Sidney reached the open moorland and drew rein, patting the neck of Harkaway, whose veins were standing up like a network of cords, and upon whose chest and legs were flecks of foam, he was a very different person from the Sidney Aschenburg of the morning, and was able to regard that other thinking, fidgeting self quite curiously.

What a fool he had been! Why, he had been awake half the night, tossing and turning, and thinking he had got into the most confounded hobble; and then, for an hour and a half after breakfast, he had absolutely given himself up to the making of plans by which he should be freed. Freed from a hobble that never existed! He positively could laugh aloud at the thought. Why, after all, what was this thing, this affair, this flirtation that

he had bothered himself about? If he chose to amuse himself with Maggie—and this of course was the real truth of the matter, for the distance was immeasurable of his falling in love with her—if he chose to amuse himself with meeting her, and if she had no objections, what was there to say against it?

The desire to see Maggie was slowly creeping into his veins, and he found himself beginning to look forward to that day in the following week when she had promised to be at the quarry again.

He would certainly keep up this pretty fantastical make-believe of love for a little while longer, for it was only making-believe or "pretending" as children say; and there was no fear of Maggie misunderstanding, for she had plenty of common sense, and would know as well as he did, that a man in his position could have nothing in reality to do with her. And so he would let things drift on. September would soon be here, and then, with visitors in the house, there would be other distractions,

and it would be easy to explain to Maggie that engagements kept him at home. She would not think then so unkindly of him as she would if he broke off their intimacy now, and there would also be a more reasonable excuse for his staying away.

Pooh! what a serious affair he had been making of a very trivial matter. He had allowed his imagination to work upon it, until every act had assumed gigantic proportions.

Here Sidney turned his mare's head homewards, Harkaway champing her bit and twisting impatiently sideways.

"Not had enough of it, my beauty? Why your flanks are heaving yet."

Nevertheless the shadow of horse and rider moved slowly across the short grass and scrubby hedge for the next half-hour, and it was close upon one o'clock when Sidney stood before the lodge gates, his face freed from the traces of care which it had worn as he rode out of the stable-yard.

CHAPTER VI.

QUOIT-PLAYING.

Tom Farrar, the landlord of the Garod Arms, was standing with his hands in his pockets, his double chin resting comfortably upon his dog-eared collar, as he looked up the length of Staneby and wondered whether any of the men would be turning out in the evening for a game of quoits. During the past fortnight they had mustered in very small numbers, owing to the extra work which the haymaking season had brought them; but it being Saturday night, and the weather fine enough for the farmers to leave their hay out contentedly over Sunday, Tom Farrar was beginning to hope in his own mind that he might get a game. The

coppers in his pockets were being lifted up and slowly allowed to drop one by one, as he gravely cogitated. He was a short, stout, pale man, with an unusual length of upper lip, which gave an expression of pompous consequence to his face; while the lower lip, protruding and yet held tightly in at the corners, suggested the possibility of egotism.

A man with a carpenter's bag was coming up the road, and Tom Farrar fixed his eyes on him. He would have been a pleasant person for the landlord to have had a chat with, for being on his way home from making a coffin for old Mark Tindale, Jonathan Tindale's brother, who had been found dead in his bed that morning, he would doubtless have known many details which had not yet got out into the village. So soon, therefore, as the carpenter was within speaking distance, Tom Farrar ejaculated the monosyllable, "Warm."

But it only elicited a curt north-country response; for, with a side-way nod of the head and the word "Ay," the workman passed on.

The encounter had however changed the current of the landlord's thoughts, and with his face now turned to watch the retreating figure of the carpenter, he began to speculate upon Matthew Tindale's probable behaviour upon the death of his relative, and whether his old father would be able to persuade him to go to the funeral. The question became so interesting, that the last penny fell from his fingers and clinked amongst the others lying at the bottom of his pocket, without any further attempt being made to continue the occupation. Indeed so absorbed was he in following out the train of speculation which had begun with Matthew Tindale's probable presence at the funeral, that he did not hear the clumsy, uneven tread of a long-legged fellow who was slowly sauntering up to him, a piece of straw in his mouth and his hat very much on one side.

"Hullow, Tom," called the new-comer in a voice loud enough to be heard at the other end of the village.

"Hullow," cried the landlord as he turned round. "So it's you, is it?"

"Ay, it's me," was the laconic answer.

"Ye've soon got shot o' your work. I was just wishing somebody wad come up, for I feel rather in a talking way. There's nothing like a death, partic'lar when it's sudden, for making one neighbourly."

"You mean old Mark Tindale. Well, I was just wondering a bit since myself, whether there wouldn't mebbe be a turn-out to-night. Ye see, poor old chap, he was very well known."

"I shouldn't be surprised if we gather up very well;" and Tom Farrar's long upper lip looked more sententiously pompous than ever as he said this. "An' I shouldn't wonder if it was glasses instead o' quoits. Folk sometimes likes a talk wi' beer an' pipes when there's been a death—it's more lively like."

"Ay," returned the long-legged man, Bill Taylor by name; "a death goes against some

folk's stomachs, an' they seem as if they can't get rid on't."

"I was never o' that kind myself." Here the landlord rubbed his capacious waistcoat. "Nothing of t' kind ever upsets me. Why, bless ye, I've had my dinner in the same room with a corp, an' it's never made a bit o' difference."

"Cush," ejaculated the other slowly. "I can't say I could go as far as that mysel'. There's something so uncommon queer about them."

"Oh, bless ye, it's just as ye've a mind. If ye keep a good ho'd o' yersel' ye can do most things." The landlord wore an air of superiority as he said this, and looked over Bill Taylor's shoulder to see if any one else were making his way to the Garod Arms. No one being in sight, he turned to his companion with the question, "Hev ye any idea how t' old chap will hev left his money? He's got a good stock on it, I'll warrant."

"There's only Jonathan Tindale for it, if

ye're speakin' of relashins." Bill Taylor here seated himself on the stone settle beside the door of the inn, while he meditatively chewed the bit of straw.

"Phew," returned his companion contemptuously. "I believe they did just speak, but that was all. Don't tell me Mark will hev left his money to them—just as like to me, every bit."

Here a little spare woman, with a row of projecting under-teeth and sharp grey eyes, appeared in the doorway. It was Tom Farrar's wife, a woman who was always spoken of as having been gay and flighty in her youth, and who in the early days of married life had given her husband cause for jealousy. She stood listening for several minutes to the conversation, with her bony hands resting on her hips; then elbowing her way past her husband, she turned round facing the two men with the words, "Maggie Tindale, indeed; she carries her head far too high to come to any good. She can never

look my way an' give me a nod, not she, an' me who has nursed her many a time when she was a baby in arms. It makes one turn fairly sick to see the pride o' some people. It's all very well when folks *hev* something to be proud of—like when they've a carriage an' horses, or a grand house, ye must just put up with it, an' wonder why Providence made you to walk an' them to ride."

"Whisht, whisht! The girl's right enough," interposed the husband testily, feeling annoyed that his wife had come to interrupt the conversation. "She was scouring down the doorsteps when I passed this forenoon. That isn't much like pride."

"She keeps hersel' far too much to hersel'. There isn't a house in the village that's good enough for her to put her foot into. When we hed our tea-party last Sunday, an' I was fool enough to ask her to it, she said she was much obliged, but she hed an engagement that wad prevent her coming. I saw well enough she didn't care to come to it. An'

then such a grand way o' puttin' it; my word, I thought, but my lady is takin' upon hersel' fine airs, she'll soon be hevin' cards with her name written on them like t' quality, an' leavin' them at everybody's door."

"Well, whisht, whisht. Here's Neddy Kendal an' Joe Brown coming up, and—nay, surely not with his uncle lying a corp, an' so sudden too—ay, but it is. Well, I never thought Mattha wad hev turned up to-night."

As Matthew Tindale came along the road, he was joined by several men who had stepped out of their cottages so soon as his stalwart figure had come into sight. These were the regular players, who at half-past seven on fine evenings were expected by the landlord of the village inn. It could not be said that Tom Farrar benefited much in a pecuniary way by them; for some were total abstainers, while the others, with the exception of one glass of beer upon separating for the night,

were usually too much interested in their game to run the danger of unsteadying their eye or hand. But the knot of idlers who gathered round, some sitting on an over-turned stone trough, while others watched the game from the vantage ground offered by a wall running round the stable-yard of the inn, did occasionally find it thirsty work, and would bid Mrs. Farrar bring out a jug of her best brown ale.

"Why, Mattha; I didn't think ye'd come to-night," was the salutation of the landlord, his long upper lip drawn down with a gravity that became the occasion.

"An' why not? Did ye think I was one o' them folks that's so much taken up with their business that they've no time for a little bit o' play? I don't mind putting in fourteen hours work into a day, or fifteen on a pinch; but as I believe no man hes a right to make a slave of hissel no more than he hes a right to make a slave of another, it isn't always that I do it. A man's got a body to take care on as well as

a soul, an' I take it to be true religion to take care on them both."

"I should think there's little need now for ye to work over hours, any way," put in Bill Taylor, tilting his hat over to the other side so that he could see Matthew's face.

"There'll be t' same need as ever there was. Some of you will likely want a horse shoeing in a hurry, or a bit o' smithyin' work done when in general I'd be out o' t' shop," answered Matthew, ignoring Bill Taylor's meaning.

There was a momentary pause, and then Neddy Kendal, the village shoemaker, a little man, with a loud voice and an aggressive way of talking, thrust his hands beneath the folds of the black calico apron, which was twisted round his waist, and remarked that there were a few who could do without the smithy being opened morning, noon, and night, so that "folks needn't pride theirsels upon their generosity."

The blacksmith turned and faced the speaker with undisturbed serenity, while sounds of dis-

approval were heard amongst the bystanders. "Nay, nay," and "come, come," and "I don't care who says it, but there isn't a readier man than Mattha to help a chap."

Neddy Kendal, finding that public opinion was against him, here shook his fist at a little fellow in petticoats, who was dragging an old tin can by a string and coming toward them, saying in a loud voice, while he advanced from the group of men—

"Come here, if thou dar', an' I'll give the sec a wiggin' as'll send the back to the mother."

A look of anger came into Matthew Tindale's face, and his right hand involuntarily closed; but he made no attempt at interference, merely swinging round on his heel in order to turn his back upon the bullying offender. Bill Taylor, however, slowly drew up his long legs, which he had stretched out before him, and, getting upon his feet, said a word of expostulation to the father, while he called the child to him, stooping so as to bring his face

upon a level with that of the little one, and rubbing the palms of his hands together by way of encouragement.

"There's a man," he said, when the sturdy legs had brought their owner within reach. "Bring his tin can here, and sit down along side o' me."

As the straw hat with its broken rim, the tartan frock, and little red arms tugging at the piece of string passed close to the blacksmith, he looked down at them, a smile lighting up his face; then he put detaining hands round the child, and lifting it up in his arms, held one of the chubby cheeks caressingly against his own.

"Now then, come on," broke in the landlord, as he came with the quoits in his hand from the house, having found it was to be quoits and not glasses as he had expected. "Whichever of ye hev a mind to play must toss up. Them's t' rules."

In a few minutes the players were chosen, and Neddy Kendal, with his hand still grimy

from his trade of clogging, was swaying a quoit to and fro as he took aim. At length it sped from his hand, and, twisting in the air, fell to the ground, where it rolled several yards past the hob.

A suppressed chuckle sounded amongst the bystanders and caused Matthew Tindale to look up to see how the game was opening, his eyes moving with a quiet observant glance from one player to another. He did not interfere, however, when Neddy Kendal said the quoit was twisted and would not carry straight, and that it had caused several games to be lost the week before, although he knew the quoits to be right, having just had them at the smithy, where their jagged and cut edges had been smoothed beneath his hammer. But when the dispute grew warm, and Tom Farrar turned to him as an authority, he took the ring of iron without a word from the landlord's hand, and, slipping the child gently from his arms upon Bill Taylor's knee, where it would be out of the reach of the flying

quoits, stepped into the little circle of men, among whom none disputed in louder tones than Neddy, who had staked "glasses round" upon the issue of the games. Without a moment's hesitation he fell into the attitude of a practised player, and grasping the quoit firmly, with eyes intently fixed upon the piece of white paper which marked the position of the hob, he sent it into the air with a swift movement of his arm, when, after a clean and steady rise and fall, it fell to the ground, loud cries of "a ringer" bursting spontaneously from the bystanders.

"I think that tells whether it's straight or not." Matthew's words were spoken quietly enough, but there was a gleam of triumph in his eyes as they rested for the first time on the shoemaker.

The game after this proceeded without any interruption, and the players being unevenly balanced and consequently affording little excitement to the bystanders, the landlord of the Garod Arms found time to gratify his

curiosity concerning Matthew Tindale's feelings about the death of his relative. Standing in front of the stone bench where the blacksmith had seated himself, he began once more to turn his coppers over in his pockets in a thoughtful manner, his under lip protruding as he considered the best method of opening the subject.

"So t' old chap's gone," he remarked at length. And then seeing that Matthew showed no signs of entering into conversation, he abruptly forced him into a reply by the question, "Who do ye think 'll be t' richer for't?"

"Hev ye niver heard tell that illgotten money takes a curse to its bed? because I hev," was the evasive answer. "An' if ye ask me who'll be t' richer for't, I'll say it's him who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and hed the devil for his godfather."

"Why, t' law gave it to t' old chap, didn't it? There was a deal o' talk about it at the

time, I know, an' everybody said his brother's widda hadn't a ha'porth o' chance."

"Hev ye never seen a big dog worrying a little un? An' if ye hev, did it ever strike ye that the little un was like to win? Nay, sure enough, the big un would get the best of it an' the bone too—but whether the little un hedn't the right to it is another thing." Matthew folded his arms across his great square chest and looked up at the landlord, while an expression of impatience crossed his face.

The landlord became yet more thoughtful, and his double chin tried to nestle itself more comfortably upon the bosom of his shirt. Then, with a knowing shake of the head, which had a certain dignity imparted to it by the serious expression of his face, he said, "But would ye object to pick t' bone with t' big dog?"

"Object!" returned Matthew, with sudden vehemence, his eyes sparkling, and his whole figure bridling with anger. "Object! Do

ye take me for a man that wad lay hold on other folks's goods? I know well enough what ye mean, an' I'll tell ye plainly once for all, if I hed t' chance of touching Mark Tindale's money, I wouldn't lay hold of it with t' coal rake. That money was ill got, an' if the dead cannot give it back to them as rightly owns it, let them take it with them and trundle every penny, curses an' a', before them into t' next world."

"Ye'r puttin' too fine a point on it, Mattha;" and the landlord's capacious waistcoat seemed to project a couple of inches further as he spoke, and the mouth tightened its egotistical corners. "They say every man eats a peck o' dirt afore he dies, only nobody knows on it."

"Them that likes dirt may eat it—I won't." Matthew got up from the stone bench as he said this, and, a change of players taking place, went to the other end of the bit of ground with Bill Taylor, who had been chosen as a fitting handicap for him.

The evening sky was streaked with long thin clouds, which toward the west were broken up into detached, downy-looking masses that melted into an amber haze as they reached the horizon. Swallows were darting in circles round the roof of the little inn, and an occasional rook—a late straggler from the flock which an hour ago had darkened the air—passed with swifty whirring wing on its way to the Great Wood at the back of Staneby Hall. The landlord's clock had struck eight with a thin metallic ring. Mrs. Farrar had been out with a tray of glasses and a brown jug that had given up its foaming contents twice to the thirsty ones, and still the game was going on with unabated vigour. Tom Farrar had made a good score for his side, and there was some doubt whether it would not carry off the laurels, in spite of having such a powerful antagonist as Matthew Tindale. The decisive throw was being made, the bystanders calling to the players to stand back so that they might see

the game, while some endeavoured to better their position by jumping from the wall, where they had been seated, and standing as near as they could to each hob. It was Matthew's turn to play, and, with a show of greater carefulness than was seen in his attitude when he had thrown the quoit to prove its truthfulness to Neddy Kendal, he stooped, taking aim at the scrap of white paper, which was the only thing now in the fading light that could be seen distinctly at the opposite end of the ground. He swung his arm slowly backwards and forwards, while those who were favouring his side called to him to be steady, to make sure of his aim before he let go, to take plenty of time, and not let the quoit fly from his hand until it was well steadied.

The quoit suddenly skimmed through the air, turned, rolled, and then fell dead several yards from the hob.

What had happened to Matthew Tindale? Exclamations of surprise, one or two rustic

oaths, and then the sudden clamour of voices all talking together greeted this unexpected bad play.

The blacksmith had not remained in the half-bent, expectant attitude of one who waits to mark the fall of his quoit, but had raised himself the instant it had left his hand, a disturbed expression on his face and his eyebrows slightly contracted.

Loud voices on all sides sought for an explanation. Had he done it on purpose? Had some one baulked him just when he was going to throw? Had the men been standing too near for his arm to have free play?

But Matthew put all these questions aside with the unanswerable remark, that "every man makes a miss sometimes, and could not always be sure of his aim."

To the villagers it would have seemed a trifling thing which had caused the brawny arm of the blacksmith to play him false. Just when the quoit was on the point of leaving his hand, the figure of his sister

coming down the village lane had crossed his vision, and some of his muscles involuntarily tightening, the iron ring had had a false impetus given to it, and curving in obedience, had fallen dead.

"Well, it isn't often ye hev such a miss," remarked the landlord as he bid him good night.

"Not often," was the reply. And Matthew turned away, not carrying his head towering above his square shoulders but drooping it forward with eyes that sought the ground, while two deep marks came between the eyebrows and showed the contraction of the forehead. Perplexed thoughts, which he had banished during the evening's recreation, had been conjured up by the sight of his sister, and were calling to him with loud persistent voice.

For Maggie still refused to tell him the name of the man whom she evidently went to meet once and sometimes twice a week; for so Matthew had come to interpret the

evening walks which it had become her habit to take, and he was harassed and disturbed by the half confidence which she had reposed in him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TINDALES AT HOME.

THE kitchen in Jonathan Tindale's house was entered from the road; and as the door usually stood open from the moment Mrs. Tindale, who was an early riser, came downstairs until the darkness warned the occupants that it was time to be going to bed, it was easy for any passer-by to see all that was going on within. This, of course, was only in the summer. In winter the door, with its coat of bright green paint growing dull with exposure to sun and rain, was kept closed, saving sometimes at midday when the weather was fine, and Mrs. Tindale thought a breath of air would be welcome.

It was a square room, with walls that were covered with a yellowish brown paper. The ceiling was well supplied with crooks, and a flitch of bacon, a tin canister filled with oat-cake, an Italian iron, other irons of the ordinary shape, and the basket in which Mrs. Tindale carried home what she called her "marketings," were hung upon them. On the mantelpiece, which was so high that Matthew was the only one who could comfortably lift down its ornaments, were a pair of handsome brass candlesticks, several pewter dishes, and a white china dog. Bright gleams shone upon the settle which stood at one side of the fireplace; and the chairs, tables, and the inlaid chest of drawers, which had come into the family as part of Mrs. Tindale's marriage dowry, reflected long thin shafts of light as they stood arranged in prim order against the wall. The hearthstone was whitened, and a white cork-screw pattern was rubbed as a border upon the stone floor. Maggie had been taught to do this when a very little girl; and every

Saturday afternoon she still knelt with the skirts of her dress pinned up, her home-knitted black stockings showing off the strong well-formed ankles, while her hand carefully moved the rubbing-stone round and round in exact curves.

It was the day after old Mark Tindale's funeral. Tea was over, and Jonathan Tindale had taken his usual corner seat on the settle, a red cotton pocket-handkerchief thrown over his head, his spectacles on his nose, and a copy of Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" lying open on a small table before him. He was not a great reader. *The Merton Advertiser* occupied him for several evenings in the week, when conscientiously beginning with the editor's remarks, he would read to the column of jokes, with which the paper closed. But since the sudden death of his brother, he had been devoting himself to serious literature; and the "Pilgrim's Progress" being, as he considered, too much of a story to have any religion in it, and Baxter's

"Saints' Rest" "what you might call a book all damnation an' glory without a clear statement of fac's," he had turned to the book of martyrs as one likely to contain all that the strictest theologian would consider necessary, with the additional advantage of its being pointed by examples, all of which, should he fall into like circumstances, might be set up for imitation. He looked up occasionally from his book, as, with one finger held under the word at which he paused, and his dark eyes gleaming brightly from beneath his shaggy eyebrows, he would exclaim in emphatic tones to Maggie, who was sitting opposite to him, "I can tell ye they were first-class Christians in those days, an' no mistake about it;" or, "Cush now; but I do begin to think their bodies must hev been made o' different stuff till ours; I'se sure I couldn't bear to hev my body sawn in two, and to hev to lay on t' top o' t' smithy fire while they blew t' bellows, till I was all of a cinder; I couldn't bear it, I tell ye, I'se sure I couldn't." After which, with a solemn shake of the head,

he returned to his reading, careful always to take it up at the very word where he had left off.

Maggie, a large bowl of gooseberries on her lap, which she was making ready to preserve, lifted her eyes to her father's face, as she replied laconically to these remarks. She scarcely heard them, or if an outer sense took notice of them it was but that she might answer reasonably, her mind being given up to a delicious reverie, in which she lived again the hours of the previous evening, seeing with an inner sight, and hearing with the delicate ear of memory. The feeling of compunction when she thought of her duplicity, which now surrounded so many of her everyday actions, and which at times laid hold upon her with a grasp so firm that it defied all her efforts to shake it off, was at that moment driven back into some far recess where the roughness of its sackcloth could not be seen, and where the sting of its lash was forgotten.

Matthew was seated at a table before the open doorway, the works of an eight-day clock, which he had taken from their case, lying spread out before him—the face with its painted horsemen above the circle of figures—how beautiful, when a child, he had thought the two horses, the bay and the black, with their long thin necks—pins and wheels of various sizes, the long chain upon which the weight was suspended, and lastly the weight itself.

Whenever the clock stopped without any apparent reason, or was found to be keeping bad time—a thing that often occurred, for it was regulated by the stable clock at the Hall, which was kept according to the butler's watch —Mrs. Tindale always felt sure it must want cleaning, and enlisted her son's services. For Matthew, besides being the best blacksmith within a radius of twenty miles, could do a little carpentering; had been known to fasten a slate that the wind had loosened; was a capital hand at tinkering up the can which Maggie

took to the well for water; and, as an additional accomplishment, could take the eight-day clock to pieces and put it together again.

So, on this particular evening, Matthew sat where the light could fall upon his work, patiently lifting wheel after wheel and examining it as it lay on his open palm. The sunlight fell upon the closely cropped fair head as it bent over the work, upon the checked shirt where it appeared beneath the unbuttoned waistcoat, upon the coloured handkerchief which was worn loosely tied about the neck, and lastly on the blue cotton jacket which was worn on summer evenings when work in the forge was over.

"She's got nothing wrong with her that I can see," he was saying to his mother, who at that moment had pushed past the table which almost filled the doorway, and was looking with an air of pride and satisfaction at a brood of chickens that were making their way down the lane.

"Nothing the matter!" exclaimed the

person whom he had addressed. "Ye're mistaken this time, my lad. I tell ye she was wound up on Saturday night—yer father does it as reg'lar as clockwork afore he goes to bed—an' when I come downstairs on Wednesday mornin' she was stan'in'; an' I went up an' I looked in her face, an' then I opened the door an' looked at pen'lum; but it was not a bit o' use, she was stan'in' as still as a church steeple."

Mrs. Tindale was a tall, broad-shouldered woman, with a handsome good-tempered face, sunburnt and rosy. The wrinkles that were on her forehead and round her eyes were scarcely noticeable, while the strong white teeth, the quick gleams of the blue-grey eyes, and the upright carriage bore testimony to the youthfulness of her constitution. She was looking with an expression of delight at this son, who was her darling, her first-born, and watching each turn of his fingers as he dropped a wheel into position.

Presently she said in a tone of satisfaction,

"Ye're about the handiest man that I ever saw. Ye took after yer Uncle Mark; he was one o' them shiftin' men that could sew a button on his coat, or make hisself a sup o' porridge, or do anything a'most up to preaching a sermon, an' I wadn't like to say he would hev been bet (beaten) with that." Then, after a pause she added, "But he's gone, poor fella, where sermons willn't be a bit o' use to him, not if they preach them till he's stone deaf."

Matthew gave an uneasy movement in his chair, taking up first one of the pins and then another, while he looked at them attentively as they lay upon his open palm. Then he said quietly, and as if he wished to ignore the latter part of his mother's speech, "Some folks seem by nature to be meant for any trade, an' can drop theirsels as easy into one hole as another."

"Well, you'd hev been a grand hand at anything, and so wad Mark. Not but what ye're as different, my word, as a nice bit o' newly washed linen is from a dirty clout.

An' ye don't feature him no more than ye feature one o' them stone faces as is in Staneby Church."

"Well, mother, he's in his grave, an' I think ye'd better let him bide there." The usually placid expression upon Matthew's face had given way to one of slight annoyance since his mother had turned the conversation from the clock, to the old man with whom he had not been on speaking terms for some years.

"I'm not meanin' to speak disrespec'ful o' them as is in their graves an' waitin' their last judgment," continued Mrs. Tindale, disregarding her son's remark, and glancing toward her husband to make sure that he was still occupied with his book, and would not hear her; "but I must say Mark Tindale was the most unlevel man I've ever seen. Just look ye now, he goes an' he leaves every stick an' stone about his place, an' every halfpenny he hed in the bank, an' even them brass candlesticks that hev stood on our mantelpiece these twenty year an' that he was

ola's (always) for hevin' as they were his own, —now I say, he goes an' leaves all them things to ye, 'an makes ye his heir in a last will and testament although ye hevn't spoken to him for a matter o' seven year. An' them cousins of his 'at thought they wad get every penny— they worked hard enough for it, an' put 'much respected' after his name when he was dead— he passes them over without even a word. Now if ye don't call that a unlevel thing, I don't know what is."

Mrs. Tindale paused and looked steadily at her son as he busied himself with the clock. Then, finding that he made no reply, she continued, while her manner and tone became confidential and emphatic—

"It's unlevel, but let me tell ye, Mattha, it's more than that—it's unlevel twice over; it's unlevel with cunning. But when I mind at it's the same man as came by his money in a fashion that folks with good hearts or a bit o' conscience in their insides wadn't hev cared about, then I says to myself, I says, 'Well,

Martha Tindale,' I says, 'ye mustn't be surprised.' "

"He's settled for life, anyway, an' where it isn't likely he'll be able to bother folk."

Matthew said these words in a tone which seemed to intimate that he would be glad if his mother put an end to the conversation. But Mrs. Tindale did not care to notice it, and went on speaking, her hands firmly planted on her broad hips, and an expression of gravity and shrewdness upon her usually good-tempered face.

"If he had left it all to them cousins of his," she said, "it wad hev seemed to most folk the likeliest thing that he could do; for they never went to see him, as Mary Dalton who cleaned and did up for him, told me, but what they took him presents in their han's: a pound o' sausages, or a boilin' o' tripe, or a packet o' peppermint lozenges—he took a deal o' them for the wind on his chest—an' them as greedy as ever they can be in their own houses. But he's worse than that. It isn't

often I'm sharp enough to find out folk's bad dealings."

Here the speaker threw another glance over her shoulder at her husband, and then putting her hands down upon the table at which Matthew was working, leaned toward him and said, in a tone low enough to escape the ears of the other occupants of the room—

"D' ye mind, Mattha, the last time him an' you spoke—seven years come Martinmas—that ye told him to his face a deal o' things that wad make him fairly dance in his shoes, if he'd any kind o' feeling whatsomever in his inside? Do you mind how ye told him that curses wad stick to that money as thick as fleas till a dead rat?"

There was a pause, and finding that his mother evidently expected a reply, Matthew nodded an affirmative.

"Well, then, I can tell ye, my lad, he's remembered that. An' he's said to hisself, he's said, 'Now if it's true that curses stick to that money as my nevvy Mattha Tindale says

they do, I'll give him the benefit of them when I'm gone, an' I'll just settle the curses right away on his head in a manner that'll make everybody cry out how well I've done by him.' For it stands to reason, Mattha, he couldn't leave ye the curses without leavin' ye his fortun'."

"Curses don't stick to honest folk," was the curt reply, the speaker drawing a string at the same moment which caused the wheels of the clock to whirl round sharply.

"I'se not so sure about that, my lad. Last night when I was in bed I couldn't help wakin' up yer father—an' he's very deaf is yer father when he's on his right side—well, I couldn't help wakenin' him up, an' I just asked him if he thought his brother hed done it as the best way o' servin' ye out for what ye'd said to him. Them's my very words. So I says to yer father, I says, if he thinks he's settled all his curses on our lad's head with his money, I shalln't be a bit sorry for him when he's in tormints, and Mark Tindale 'll see what it is to

ask for a drop o' cold water an' not to get it, for I've made up my mind I'll not give him't, even if every hair o' his head's in a blaze."

"Come, mother, ye're gettin' on a long way with yer story. This morning ye'd only got as far as t' curses, but ye've got Uncle Mark in tormints now."

"Well, poor man, I don't wish him no evil," returned Mrs. Tindale, checking herself; "but ye must say, Mattha, as how it's very hard on me to think about them curses. It isn't as if they were things that one could get hold of; but, ye see, they're masterful kind o' things, and just come fairly sneaking in upon ye, until things hes got such a bad twist that it's hardly a bit o' use even to say yer prayers. I hev sec a feel about curses as I can't tell ye. An' when I think about Mark Tindale an' how he's set such a lot agoin' for ye—mebbe some o' them's got to work on ye already for what I know—is't to be wondered at that I'm fairly angered with him, an' wish he may be in

tormints? Nay, it isn't; I wadn't be yer mother if I didn't wish it."

Here Mrs. Tindale raised herself suddenly and once more clapped her hands upon her hips, the colour heightened in her cheeks, and her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Mother, I'll tell ye what ye wad do if ye were standin' where ye could see Uncle Mark all of a blaze." Matthew carefully put the clock upon the table, and leaning back in his chair put his hands into the pockets of the blue cotton jacket, while he turned his quick bright glances upon his mother, a smile lurking round the corners of his mouth. "Ye wad just run as fast as ever yer legs could carry ye, an' teem out t' biggest bucket of water over him that ye could find."

"I wadn't, Mattha. I might be sorry to see him, an' turn away my eyes, but I wadn't help to put him out," returned Mrs. Tindale energetically.

Matthew shook his head, still smiling.

"Come, mother, there isn't a single body

with a bark as little use as yours. One knows, even if ye were trodden into t' very dust ye wadn't hev the heart to bite."

"Well, not perhaps so much for myself. But if folks did any harm to ye or Maggie, I'se fairly sure I'd turn on them."

"I doubt it, mother, I must say I doubt it. You'd feel mebbe all of a fury at first, but yer heart wad very soon soften, an' ye'd begin to make excuses for them, an' say that ye were sure they hedn't meant to do half t' wrong they hed."

"Well, I don't know, my lad. It's hard tellin' what I mightn't do if any body meddle't with you or Maggie."

Mrs. Tindale here turned her head suddenly to the open door, her chin trembling and a mist of tears shutting out the landscape.

Matthew returned to his work, the expression of slight annoyance which his face had worn during the greater part of the conversation with his mother, slowly disappearing. He had not worked long, however, when the sound

of approaching wheels caused him to look up, but only with that momentary glance which a busy man will give to a passing object. But to Mrs. Tindale, the sight of a carriage was of sufficient importance to lead her thoughts away from old Mark Tindale and the vexations about his will, and she turned to her daughter, bidding her come quickly and tell her if it were from Derthwaite.

Maggie set down the bowl of gooseberries, but it was only because she had finished her work, and untied the apron which had been put over the new black gown, and smoothed the upturned sleeves. She did not mean to go to the door; she never went to the door now to look at the Derthwaite carriage. And as she stood with her fingers toying idly among the gooseberries, her face drooping over the bowl and looking like one of those creamy roses under whose petals lie stolen the hues of the early morning, the delicate flush swept over her cheeks and temples, and threaded the tiny ears with crimson. Only the crushing

sound of wheels, and the joyous, glad trembling of soul had become hers with which a woman dreams of the presence of the man she loves.

Gradually the sound died away, and then she turned suddenly, and walking across the kitchen drew the crook forward which hung in the wide old-fashioned chimney, raking the coals together, and saying in a voice which she meant to be gay and cheerful—somehow her mood had suddenly changed—that they had better have supper, for it was getting late.

"Aye, let's hev our suppers," echoed old Jonathan Tindale, and closed his book without waiting to finish the sentence he was reading. "When ye talk o' suppers I must put this away. Martyrs an' suppers don't go well together. The one's what ye may say is o' this world, an' the other is mebbe something o' the next."

Half-an-hour later Mrs. Tindale put a candlestick into Maggie's hand, telling her to go to bed, for she looked tired and white, adding that it had been too much for her,

standing in the afternoon sun gathering gooseberries, and another time she must put off such work until the evening.

The tears started into Maggie's eyes as she obeyed her mother, and as she went up the narrow staircase, the tones of that mother's voice echoed about her, and a sharp thrill of pain passed through her heart.

It is a trite saying, we can only have one mother; a small intellect can grasp it, but only a large heart can comprehend the deep and solemn truths which lie beneath those simple words. Never but once is this rich possession granted to us; we may trifle with it, we may cast it aside as worthless, we may, in the folly and madness of our youth, even despise it, to awaken, perhaps when it has gone from us for ever, to the knowledge that the gift is placed but once within the reach of man, and that in no other relationship can we find a love so precious or so unselfish.

When Maggie reached the little room with its plain deal bedstead; its scoured floor with

the strip of carpet in front of the chest of drawers; its one rush-bottomed chair and its painted chest containing her winter clothes, on the top of which stood the washing-basin and the jug from which she had knocked the handle and the spout when a very little girl, she put the candlestick down and standing in front of the tiny looking-glass, but without casting one glance at its speckled surface, buried her face in her hands, tears slowly trickling between them. Some slight knowledge of the preciousness of her mother's love had dawned upon her.

Several minutes did she stand motionless, neither sob nor quickening breath breaking the silence. Then she took her hands away from her face, and pressed her cotton pocket-handkerchief upon it until the tears were dried. And after this she seated herself on the edge of the low bedstead, her head drooping and her vacant eyes fixed.

Oh, if she could only tell her mother, was the thought that first shaped itself; if she

might only call her into the little bedroom and putting her head upon her bosom weep out her troubles, her perplexities, her joys, as she had done when a child. Here the tears rose again, but were instantly checked and held back by a strong effort of will.

When would all this come to an end she wondered? Would he ever, would Sidney Aschenburg ever say to her that he could no longer let her wait through all these long days, for they were long days, even when they could be counted till she should see him again? Would he ever say to her that they were to end, and that she was to have no more watching and waiting but be with him always? Here Maggie's heart stood still and then leaped with quick bounds. How could such a thing happen to her? What would his mother say? She who was so proud a lady that no one ever saw her look to one side or the other from her carriage. His guardian too, the gentleman with the white hair who sometimes passed the smithy—she did not

think him proud—but then he looked like Mr. Sidney Aschenburg, quite different from her and from all the people with whom she associated. What would they say if Sidney took her home to Derthwaite? what would they say about it, and she a village girl? Oh, how angry they would be, and how she would shrink before their cold proud looks.

As a curled-up leaf is tossed upon a rippling stream, so did the mind of the girl move confusedly. Did he love her enough to sacrifice great things? Did gentlemen ever love village girls as the women in their own rank of life? Yesterday she had stood within reach of his hand, and had been conscious of the subtile presence of refinement which belonged to another world from that of the men with whom her lot had hitherto been cast, as, meekly doing his bidding, she had raised her lips to his. The remembrance of that moment came over her, and she seemed to feel his arm steal round her and the support of his strong frame. Just so would she need to have his protecting

arm about her she thought, if she were ever to face the terrors of Derthwaite, the proud lady trailing about in her silks, and the guardian with his erect figure, and the crowd of servants who would be watching everything she did and laughing to see how frightened she was and awkward. And here Maggie forgot about these things as she felt, in imagination, the light caressive touch of a hand passing over her head to catch up a straying lock and tuck it behind her ear. She was sure Sidney loved her. He would be able to make an easy way of escape from all their difficulties. He would perhaps tell her some day that they would go to Staneby Church quite early in the morning, before any footsteps had crossed the green and wiped away the dew, before the children had begun to peep out of the cottage doors, or indeed before the smoke had begun to curl from the chimneys. And the village would be very quiet, and no one would know that there was a wedding going on, not even old Teddy Skurr, for they would not want

him to come to ring the bells. Only Matthew and her father and mother would know of it and would be standing with her in the church. And then Mr. Sidney Aschenburg would take her away with him, perhaps even as far as London town, where they would forget all about fine ladies and servants and horses and carriages. At the thought of such a peaceful end to her perplexities, Maggie's eyes brightened a little and a smile played about her mouth, and the tension of her brow relaxed.

But it was only momentary, for as the curled leaf is whirled round in a foaming vortex, so was she carried away by a sudden in-sweeping wave of emotion. She started to her feet—but quietly, for the sound of any one pacing a room was easily heard in that little house—and began walking from one end of the strip of carpet to the other. What was it she asked herself? How could she have dared? How unjust, how base, how cruel she had been to him! She believed in him, she believed he loved her; she trusted in the

expression of his dear face, in the truthfulness of his smallest word. Oh, what would he say to her if he knew of this outburst of doubt?

Placid confidence is only regained with difficulty: so it is not surprising that Maggie veered about from one gnawing suspicion to another, her love tormenting her and crying shame upon her all the time for her misgivings. Now it was Sidney who would weary of her; now it was the tongue of rumour which, gathering up in some mysterious way a knowledge of their meetings, would bring it to him and frighten him into coldness; now it was she herself who by perversity would drive them apart, praying that she might tell Matthew, or her mother, or saying that she did not like those secret meetings in the wood. Or there were other dangers; he might go away from Derthwaite and so forget her; or—and it was upon this thought Maggie dwelt the longest, for it was the most painful as well as the most familiar—

some day he might be led into looking into another face; a beautiful lady, a real lady such as she could never hope to be, might come walking along the terrace at Derthwaite, with lily-white hands and speech soft like the waters of a trickling brook, and a face more beautiful than any in the painted windows of Staneby church. And Sidney would forget that he had ever folded a village girl in his arms, he would forget all about Maggie and how he had whispered to her that she was his delicate white rose.

How could she bear this long strain of waiting! Maggie clasped her hands about her throat, and wondered if anything had really risen in it that could choke her. Then she straightened her shoulders as she had seen Matthew do in the forge, and took a deep breath. It was time she undressed and went to sleep. But before the new black gown could be taken off, and even before she had loosened the brooch which fastened it at her neck, she had thrown herself full

length upon the bed, and, burying her face in the pillow, was sobbing, not with a child's easily appeased sobs, but with those passionate ones which come with womanhood. The perplexities, the sorrows, the difficulties of her position had again come over her, and with them the recollection of the deception which she was practising upon the kind-hearted mother, who only that night had pitied her for her pale looks, and had said the gathering of gooseberries in the sunshine had been too much for her.

CHAPTER VIII.

MATTHEW VISITS HIS LAWYER.

It was the beginning of August—nearly three weeks after old Mark Tindale's death. The hay had been carried from the meadows and fields around Staneby, and the lull which sometimes comes between the two busy seasons, the hay and the corn harvest, was welcomed by the farmers and work people, more especially by the women, who complained of the weekly mending having fallen into arrears, and that all the stockings were through both at the toe and heel. The farm-horses were standing about in the fields under any shade they could make available against the sun's rays; their eyes sleepy and

inert, their under lips drooping, their feet occasionally stamped, or their tails switched at some annoying fly. A few days of such light wind and sunshine and the heads of grain would begin to droop, and the brief holiday for horses and men would be over.

It was a day to gladden the heart of every farmer about Staneby. Clouds sailed across the blue sky that were light and fleecy and did not pack themselves above the horizon. The outline of the distant hills was softened, and the jagged sides of those lying nearer were smoothed by a thin haze that gave promise of still greater heat. Wafted across the green lanes, was the scent of the flowers that crept over the banks and hedges, together with the delicate smell of the ripening grain. In the orchards, some of the apples were turning from a cold, crude green to palest yellow; while the cheeks of others, like those of some fine lady, were touched with crimson. It was a glorious day for the children, who wandered off into the meadows and sat down

upon the grass, and pulled the seed-vessels of the dandelion and tried to find out what o'clock it was; and for the grown-up people, too. They stood about the cottage-doors, or brought the basket of mending and set it on the wall that divided their garden from their neighbour's, and while they ran the needle in and out, talked about the difference there was between working in the fields when they were sodden with rain, and when there was nothing more than dew to damp their shoes. If only this weather would hold for another month, they might hope to house the corn with comfort to themselves.

It had been a busy day with Matthew, for the farmers had come to him urging their claims, showing that it was "a thrang time," and that, like the rest of the world, he must be content to work over-hours if other people were to be clothed and fed. So he had straightened up his powerful frame, while he told them that there were more kinds of work than one in the world; and though he

was willing to do for them what lay in his power, still there was another bit of work from which he wasn't going to turn away his hand.

Matthew worked hard all day in the forge, while the sunshine and wind came in at the open shutters, measuring and making bars and bolts, and fitting them into their places, his dinner taken only by snatches as it stood on the bench, for he had told his mother there was no time that day for him to sit down in the cottage to eat it. Then he went up to the window where his watch hung, and found that it was five o'clock by it—four, that is to say, by the day. Yes, it was time that he set off to do that other bit of work, of which he had spoken so mysteriously to the farmers; it would be half an hour before he could wash and make himself tidy, and it would take the better part of an hour to get to Merton. So giving a last look round, and a final rake to the ashes on the hearthstone, he went out of the forge.

The small market-town of Merton is between five and six miles from Staneby, a well-made public road leading to it from the village. Matthew reached it a little under the time which he had allowed himself, and when he turned into the churchyard, whose surrounding houses had once been the dwellings of the aristocracy of Merton, but which were now occupied chiefly as offices, he saw that the dingy gilt pointers of the clock on the tower yet wanted three-quarters of an hour before they would reach six. This was what he wished, for had it been later, it might have been more difficult perhaps to obtain an interview with one of the heads of the firm of solicitors whom he was about to consult.

The firm of Messrs. Hodgson, Brackenrigg, and Scatterbeck occupied one of the most important of the dwelling-houses. Its faded splendours were shown in the narrow bit of flagged courtyard and in the iron railing dividing it from the footpath; in its double doors

and brass knockers, though they were stained and weather-beaten; in its stuccoed ornamentations; and lastly in its size, and the number of windows that its three stories contained. At one of these windows on the ground-floor a clerk was standing, his hands in his pockets, his mouth in a whistling position, and his eyes fixed vacantly on the trees in the churchyard, as their leaves fluttered in the breeze, and became semi-transparent under the sunshine, like bits of cathedral glass. The sound of Matthew's steady tread catching his attention, he watched him until he saw that he turned in at the iron gate which stood open between the railings; when, with a quick swing round, he vaulted upon a tall stool, calling to Matthew to come in, when the blacksmith, after sounding one of the brass knockers, stood waiting in the doorway, the clerk meanwhile bending his head over his desk, and assiduously engrossing a deed that was spread out before him.

"Are yer masters at home?" inquired

Matthew, coming in answer to the open door of the clerk's room.

"All three of them?" And the clerk looked up with an insolent air, meaning to lighten his labours by a play of wit.

"One'll be enough for my purpose; especially if I tell him how I found ye lookin' out o' t' winda, and how lish (active) ye were in poppin' on to that stool o' yours."

The clerk was a thin, weak-looking fellow, who could write an excellent lawyer's hand, and could have commanded as good wages as any man of his years; but he found the copying of the rough draft of a will, or the engrossing of a conveyance, or even the writing of a three-and-sixpenny letter required so many excursions to the window, that but little work passed through his hands. He complained that the position maintained in writing was against a muscular development of the chest; and that being so, he was determined to stand as often as possible with his hands in his pockets, and to whistle—in a

subdued tone, of course, lest he should be overheard by his employers—in order to encourage the free expansion of his lungs. That this rustic should, however, have been observant enough to note his change of position was not much to his liking, for if he was often at the window, he yet had a very wholesome desire to be seen only at his desk. He coloured therefore at Matthew's words, and with a muttered "Interferes with one's work," and "It always shows where one begins again," he led the way up a broad oak staircase, worm-eaten and dark with age, the walls of which were wainscotted to the depth of four feet.

The portrait of a former aristocratic dweller in the house, smoke-stained and dusty, hung on the first landing. The prim mouth seemed to close over state secrets, as the lips of Messrs. Hodgson, Brackenrigg, and Scatterbeck, closed over those of their clients; while the medallion of Prince Charles Edward, which the sitter had not forgotten to wear nor the

painter to paint on his breast, pointed out the nature of those secrets—a somewhat curious circumstance, for Merton had been famous for its loyalty to the Hanoverians. As Matthew followed the clerk, who, mindful of the development of his chest, went slowly up the stairs, the mild eyes of the portrait greeted those of the blacksmith with a gentle, half-curious expression, and then watched him as he turned after his companion up the other flight of stairs, to disappear through a low, narrow door, into Mr. Hodgson's room.

The lawyer looked up with a keen glance as the clerk ushered the blacksmith into his presence, and kept his pen suspended over the sheet of note-paper on which he was writing. He was a clean-shaven, grey-faced man, with shrewd eyes, and a profusion of iron-grey hair which was smoothly brushed. He turned his eyes rapidly from the face of his client to that of his clerk, the latter instantly retreating under it, and closing the door noiselessly behind him.

"You want to see me?" interrogated the lawyer in clear, incisive tones, looking at Matthew as though intent upon peering into his very brain; but never changing his attitude, not even so much as moving his hand from the sheet of note-paper.

"That's my intenshin, if ye can give me a bit o' yer time." Matthew had taken off his hat, and had put a small bundle, tied up by the four corners of a red pocket-handkerchief, into the crown.

"Your name?"

"Matthew Tindale, blacksmith."

"Blacksmith your father's name?" And the ghost of a smile flitted round the lawyer's lips.

"It's his occupashin," was the proud rejoinder; "and in his time ye wouldn't hev found a better hand nor him."

The lawyer tossed down his pen, and, leaning back in his chair, passed a finger and thumb across his chin with a faint rasping sound, his straight grey eyebrows drawn

down and causing two perpendicular lines to appear above his nose. He was accustomed to make a quick calculation, concerning the mental and moral qualifications of those who sought an interview with him.

"Take a seat, will you?" and he waved his hand toward an empty chair standing just in front of the table at which he was writing. He rather liked the look of this countryman, and would not pass him on, as he often did such clients, to Mr. Brackenrigg.

"Come to see me on business, eh?" he asked, seeing that Matthew made no attempt to enter into conversation.

"That's it, sir. On business that's been a deal o' bother since ever it entered the family."

The lawyer raised his eyebrows and then deliberately lowered them at this enigmatical sentence, while he watched Matthew untying the knots in the red cotton pocket-handkerchief.

"These papers here'll mebbe put ye in t' way of understandin' things," continued the

blacksmith, as he carefully placed several bundles tied with red tape upon the crown of his soft felt hat which, laid across his knees, was serving the purpose of a table. "There's a packet," he went on, pointing to some letters covered with a woman's scrawling handwriting, "that'll mebbe make ye think shame o' me, that I could come and show ye such things as'll make ye double up yer fists at old Mark Tindale, as is a relashin. But things has just come to sec a pass, that I'se bound to take somebody into my confidence as can take hold of the law in a masterful-like way and manage it; and it seemed to me as there wasn't a man in Merton 'at could do that like yersel. And so, Mr. Hodgson, if ye please, I hope ye'll see yer way into givin' me a turn. An' if ye've any doubt about the pay just say so, an' I'm ready to come down with it."

"Let me hear what it is you want, and then we will talk about the pay."

"Well, it seems to me if I tell ye the whole

story from the beginning that I'll be the most likely to get it the right end up."

"Undoubtedly;" and the lawyer's lips twitched slightly, and a brighter gleam seemed to come from his eyes.

Matthew straightened himself in his chair, and with compressed lips looked past Mr. Hodgson, his eyes travelling slowly over a pile of deed boxes to the high old-fashioned grate with its hob on either side of the bars; then up the length of the bell-rope, whose faded red velvet and twisted brass serpent for a handle pointed back to the former inmates of the room, powdered and patched ladies, mayhap, who talked scandal and flirted their fans when George the Third was king. It seemed a little difficult for Matthew to collect his thoughts; but at length his roving gaze came back to the lawyer's face, and with a deep breath, as though about to strike a heavy blow upon his anvil, he said—

"My grandfather, John Tindale, married one Mary Harker for his first wife. She was

the daughter of a farmer, and all her people thought she might have looked higher than she did. She hed a bit o' money of her own; an' I think, from what I can make out of my grandfather, it was as much that as anything that tempted him into marrying her, for she was but a poor sickly kind o' body, an' not one to make the most o' things such as he would hev liked. Well, they hed one son, Tom, a sickly kind of a chap like his mother, and, strange to say, his father never took rightly to him. Indeed, when his mother died, as she did when he was only five years old, my grandfather gave up housekeeping—he was of a very saving turn—an' put him out to nurse, never seeing much of him till he was old enough to come into the smithy. By this time, ye understand, my grandfather hed married again, one called Bessy Mitchell. Well, she hed two strong thriving lads, my father an' my uncle Mark, him 'at's just dead. Now, this Bessy Mitchell was quite of a different turn to his first wife, an' was all for

saving; an' as for work, why, she was fit to rive her hands off wi' 't. Well, between them, they got enough to buy up the smithy an' build a house aside on it. Then my grandfather dies and leaves this house and smithy to my father, Jonathan Tindale, who was to pay fifteen pounds a year to Uncle Mark as long as he lived, so as to make them kind o' equal. That was right enough; I've nothing to say agen that. But now comes what'll sound very badly to honest folk." Matthew paused, as though he would prepare his hearer; then continued, speaking more slowly and emphatically, "His son Tom hed married by this time; and, for he was always a poor sickly kind of chap, had taken ill and died, leaving a widda an' one child. Well, what does my grandfather go an' do, but he leaves all his first wife's property past this widda and her child, who hed the best right to it—for please to understand I'm speaking now of the money 'at belonged to her 'at was Mary Harker, my grandfather's first wife. Well,

he goes an' leaves it past her to Mark Tindale, who was always his favourite son, for he was saving and scraping like himself; an' what does that old rascal of an uncle of mine do, but he goes an' takes it, knowing as well as anybody that not a halfpenny of it should hev been his."

Matthew leaned forward in his chair as he said the last words, and with squared elbows looked fixedly with clear eyes into the face that remained impassive at the other side of the table; for the lawyer knew too well how rapacious a creature is man to be much moved at the recital. The blacksmith, however, was astonished, and for a moment his faith wavered, and he wondered if Mr. Hodgson were as honest as people said. Indeed, it was a full minute before he could go on again, so difficult did it seem to him with such an adviser to know how to proceed.

At last he said uneasily, "Ye don't seem to think it such a queer job as I'd hev thought."

"I'm accustomed to hear of such things."

"Then do ye think it altogether straight?" The tone in which this was said betrayed the speaker's desire to have his faith re-established in his hearer.

"The strong hand holds; whether the strong hand has always justice on its side is another matter. How long is it since your grandfather died?"

"Seven-and-twenty year."

"Then the statute of limitation will bar any claim that could have been made by Tom Tindale's widow and child, supposing always the will could be proved invalid."

"Tom Tindale's widda and child hev as much a claim as ever they hed." Matthew spoke emphatically, and, swinging one of his arms, brought down his clenched fist like a hammer on Mr. Hodgson's table. Only one portion of the lawyer's remark had been understood by him, and to that he had hastened to reply.

"Not in the eyes of the law."

"Oh, be danged to the eyes o' t' law! I came here just because I didn't know anything about t' law, and because I'se determined to make over every penny o' that money to them that owns it rightly."

"To whom has Mark Tindale, your uncle, left this property?"

"To me;" and Matthew struck his chest with the palm of the hand, while he looked half defiantly at the lawyer—"to me, I tell ye. An' he's left it to t' wrong man if he thought I'd keep it."

A change could be seen slowly working in the expression of Mr. Hodgson's face. First there came a look of surprise, then of doubt; and lastly, as the grey eyebrows were drawn quickly down as if to shade the gleaming eyes which their owner knew to be too keen almost for their gaze to be comfortably borne, the thin finely-shaped lips relaxed until, like the ripple on a pool, a genial expression spread over the whole face. This was a character new to the lawyer, and one which it seemed

he was to have the opportunity of studying. Most men came to him wanting to claim what was not their own, or to learn from him how they could tighten the grasp upon that which was already in their possession; rarely—very rarely indeed—to transfer property, rightly theirs, to another without remuneration; and never to ask him to draw up deeds by which that which had been wrongfully acquired could be given back again. For half a minute he looked under the eyebrows fixedly at the man who had come to him with so extraordinary a demand. Then, assuming his usual cold, self-possessed manner, he leaned forward in his chair and asked to see Mark Tindale's will.

The blacksmith slowly untied the pink tape with which the several bundles of papers were fastened together, and handed first one and then another across the table, remarking as he did so that, "that was his grandfather's will," and that his "Uncle Mark's."

"Was your grandfather's will disputed?" suddenly asked the lawyer.

"Yes, if all them letters written by Tom Tindale's widda means disputed, it was if ever a will was." And the speaker held the packet of letters, written in a woman's hand, towards the lawyer. "I can tell ye, my blood's fairly up whenever I see them. To think that any woman should hev to ask a man for what was rightly her own."

A slight smile lurked about one corner of the lawyer's mouth. He was making an inventory of certain things in his practice.

"An' what I want ye to do," continued the blacksmith, "is to put me in the way of finding Tom Tindale's widda and child, an' then to turn over all the property to them."

"Do you not know where this woman and her child are?"

"Only that they went to the United States of North America, three or four years after my grandfather died. The little chap must be grown up to be a man by this."

"I am afraid it will be expensive work advertising for them. That, however, I suppose, will come out of the estate?"

"I'll pay for the advertisin', if ye mean that."

"No, no, out of the estate," and the lawyer tapped the papers that Matthew had handed to him significantly.

"An' make it less. No," the blacksmith continued in a decided tone, "I'll never do that as long as I've hands to work with. I've got a matter of fifty-four sovereigns put away in a box at home under my bed; an' I'll lay those out till they're done, an' then I'll go on over-hours, workin' a bit sooner an' a bit later."

"But surely you are not called upon to do all this?"

"I've a mind to give them their property back as I got it, an' not to pick it until there's nothing left but the bone."

"But my good fellow, you pick it for them, not for yourself."

"Yes, I know," said Matthew, slowly, after a moment's hesitation; "but if the bone is picked even for them, where would be the good of the bone; Uncle Mark might just as well hev lived till Methuselum an' kept it hisself."

"As you will," returned the lawyer. He had been interested by the extraordinary desire to return property that had been wrongfully inherited, and the very magnitude of the wish had rendered the idea acceptable to him. But when he heard that the expenses were intended to be borne by Matthew, he became irritable and impatient, and said to himself, that the man must be either quixotic or a fool. To relinquish to another that which the law gave but which had never been enjoyed, was an act of generosity difficult to understand; but to sacrifice hard-earned money in order to affect the transfer, was beyond comprehension.

In five minutes from that time, Mr. Hodgson was called upon to attend to another

client, and Matthew, bidding him "good day," went down the old oak staircase, and looked into the eyes of the bonnie prince's adherent with a sense of satisfaction, believing that he had forged the first link of the chain which was to convey the long-lost property to the widow of Tom Tindale.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

FRANCES CARTER.

It had been one of those bright sunny days, a day such as farmers love, with the bright sunshine and light breezes that ripen the heads of the grain and dry the sap in the tall thin stems. Fleecy clouds had sailed out of the north, like swans or boats or beautiful white maidens, and had melted away in the misty south. Here they reached the tall white mountains where they had their nests of down; or, the land whither they had been steering; or, the lovers of whose arms outstretched in welcome they had dreamed.

The children had rolled about on the village green, their arms and necks browner than any russet apple, their faces sometimes hidden against the short grass, sometimes turned fearlessly with little tight shut eyes up to the bright sun. The farmers' dogs, because it was an idle time, had curled themselves up in favourite resting places in the fold-yards; while the hens and chickens and ducks, tempted by the fine weather, made excursions into the fields in search of seeds and grubs.

And now the evening had come, and the sun had set, and the wind had fallen, leaving only breeze enough to stir the lighter stemmed leaves. Up at Derthwaite, shadows rose from the clipped box-trees on the edge of the terrace; and below, where the yew hedge separated the geometrical garden from the rosary and shrubberies, a broad band of sombreness lay. The sunflowers, and the bergamot, and crimson and pink poppies, had turned pale in the twilight, and the purple foxgloves which grew within the shade of the

oaks and Scotch firs, had begun to look like gaunt spectres. Only Derthwaite itself, with the windows of its reception rooms uncurtained and brilliantly lighted, was able to cope with the on-coming darkness.

The guests, which Mrs. Aschenburg usually entertained during the second week in August, had arrived; and a crowd of gaily dressed women, with a fair sprinkling of sombre-coated men, filled the drawing-room.

Sidney Aschenburg had been asked to sing, and after a show of unwillingness, and even, were the whole truth told, of some small signs of ungraciousness, had been prevailed upon to take his place before the piano.

He stood watching the movements of the player's fingers, who at a suggestion from Mrs. Aschenburg, had offered to be his accompanist, with a thoughtful expression which at times threatened dangerously to become one of abstraction. She had been introduced to him before dinner by his mother: then he had glanced at her face, but so little had he

noticed it, that he could not have told whether it were dark or fair. And now as he stood at her side, no thought of her entered his mind, his eyes mechanically watching the graceful arch of her hands as they moved swiftly over the keys, but never turning so much as a glance upon the small well-formed head, with its thick coil of brown hair, nor upon the square, well-shaped shoulders.

He was unwillingly breaking a promise to meet Maggie that evening in the quarry wood, having forgotten, in his usual careless fashion, when he made it, that he must be at home to receive his guests. Therefore it was, that full of annoyance on Maggie's account, and of irritability on his own, he had been during the whole evening moody and abstracted.

Since the day when he had taken that gallop upon Harkaway, he had been dallying idly with fair delusive dreams. He asked himself if, after what had been to him hours of serious reflection, he was not right in looking upon these meetings with Maggie as but

a source of innocent amusement, and as such to be continued until circumstances should easily and naturally displace them. Why, then, he argued, should any further thought be taken about them. What was to prevent him moving along the path that fate and inclination had both alike marked out. And so the short-lived compunction and subsequent struggle died away; and as a natural re-action his interviews with Maggie became more frequent and prolonged, for never will a man in Sidney's position sink more readily under the languorous influence of passion, than after a weak and futile attempt to rid himself of its bonds.

The song finished, Sidney was constrained by a feeling of courtesy, to stand and talk a little to the girl who had rendered him this trifling service, and then for the first time he marked the attractiveness of her face. Not that an ordinary observer would have called it handsome, or even pretty; but Frances Carter was notable in herself, and the com-

bined sweetness and force of her character had set their marks on it. Her features were irregular; but the eyes and mouth had some claims to beauty, the one grey in colour, and capable of much expression, the other having a short and prettily curved upper lip, and corners that dimpled attractively in smiling. Her face usually bore a thoughtful look; but when she spoke, or even if merely sitting in the attitude of a listener, the play of inward emotion would show itself in the ever varying expression, the parting and the closing of the lips, the changing colour in the cheeks, and the dilating of the eyes, and the quick fall of the soft white lids.

In Frances Carter lay the germ of a strongly receptive nature. As yet it was undeveloped, and only gave signs of its presence by a momentary expression, which would come into the clear grey eyes, of deep in-drinking sympathy; the head bent attentively forward, while tender loving words would be poured from the lips, the hands meanwhile giving out

their dumb signs of love and interest. And then would come a sudden check which told that the rich promise of her nature was as yet unfulfilled; a check which seemed to be given by her involuntarily, a check which seemed to imply that her sympathy had been withdrawn; whereas in reality it but signified that her youthfulness and inexperience had reached its boundaries, and through very ignorance her sympathy had fallen short. For Frances Carter was only two and twenty, and unless life has brought exceptional happiness and sorrow, this is too early an age for any nature to be developed, especially a receptive one which perhaps more than any other, requires the furnace of life's experience to bring it to maturity.

She sat leaning back in the chair which had been handed to her by Sidney when she left the piano, speaking to him of music, her head raised attentively toward him, as she made slight movements of acquiescence to his remarks; while in the pauses that occurred, for

Sidney was still thoughtful and abstracted, she gave those quiet unostentatious glances round the room which bring so much knowledge to the close observer.

"Do you not get tired of Florence?" asked Sidney abruptly, drawing his face between the fingers and thumb of one hand with a gesture that might have been expressive of slight boredom.

"Oh no, I am very fond of it," and the girl laughed lightly.

"I soon get to know every stick and stone about a place; and as soon as I do that, I feel that if I do not get away from it I shall hang myself on the first tree I come to."

"The sticks and stones that you talk about get to be like friends to me."

"But if there is no change there must be stagnation."

"But there are changes so violent, that all the little tender feelings which are associated with familiar places, are torn away." Frances was smiling up at Sidney as she said this; but

the words seemed to have awakened some deep feeling in her, for she broke off abruptly, and before he could answer, she turned her head and her eyelids drooped, hiding the wistful expression that had come.

Whereupon Sidney, whose interest was aroused, and with it the desire that is so easily provoked in a man of finding out what a woman has been on the point of saying but has left unsaid, especially when that woman is pretty and young, instantly determined that she should again look up at him and tell him what had been withheld.

"You will forgive my stupidity," he said, "but I scarcely followed your last remark."

"No?" returned Frances, with the tone and manner of one who is politely refusing any further explanation.

"It is my own fault of course that it was only half understood." Here Sidney paused as though waiting for her to speak.

Still she said nothing, neither did she raise her eyes from the bracelet which she

was unclasping. Sidney began to feel his curiosity completely awakened, and abandoned his carefully guarded questions. Here at least he gained a point, for Frances Carter, with her large grey eyes glittering with some emotion, lifted up her face once more to his, looking gravely at him, her lips slightly parted, but the smile which before had brightened her expression, entirely vanished.

She was thinking of her home in Florence; of the falling away of all restraints so soon as she was within its walls; of the feeling of rest; of the certainty that no strange object nor unwonted sound could break the spell, which as a vision of placid seas and unfathomable skies, ever lulled her there. She was thinking of the thousand fragile threads which bound her fast to that one spot on earth. And as she thought of it, the spirit of that home seemed present with her, and wave after wave of emotion swept with soft glittering beauty over her soul.

But to Sidney, with no key save that which

was dimly deciphered by eye and brow and lip, no knowledge of her thoughts could come. He only saw a face which shaded, as a hand that is held up before some candle, the rays of a light that burnt within. He saw the dilated pupils, the widely opened, steadily held lids; the mouth that drew in hastily the short quick breath; the colour that had risen and spread itself over ear and throat. And as he looked down upon this girl, with all the promise of a full and glorious womanhood shown in each lineament of her face, he felt his soul stirred and moved toward her with an unwonted interest. Her face had been mutely upturned to his but for the space of several seconds, and yet in that time the depth and earnestness of her character had worked upon him. He felt that he would like to know more of her, and that if possible he must get her to talk with him. And here Sidney broke the spell which the expression of that upturned face laid upon his lips.

"Do you think that we men have no feelings

of sentiment, that you so carefully guard yourself from betraying them?" Sidney dropped into a chair that was standing near to the one which was occupied by Frances Carter as he said this, and resting one arm across his knee, leaned forward, looking earnestly into his companion's face.

"Oh no, I do not think that. But our natures are different you know—a man's nature is very different from a woman's."

"And so you do not care to repeat the remark you made a few minutes ago to me. I suppose you feel my sympathy would fall short."

"I do not think you would withhold it willingly."

"Then you think because we are man and woman, we are incapable of a perfect understanding."

"I should think so—I do not know;" and Frances hesitated.

The sentiments to which she had given utterance were but the growth of the moment,

and put forward merely with the desire to keep Sidney from crossing that threshold of emotion which the remembrance of her home had conjured up. Yet they put an idea into Sidney's mind, which shaped itself and gained strength as the moments passed. A look of eagerness and earnestness came over his bearing, as, still with his arm resting across his knee, he leaned forward, looking at the face which was slightly averted from his own in momentary abstraction.

Frances Carter had expressed a doubt as to the possibility of a perfect understanding existing between a man and a woman, and by expressing that doubt, she had awakened the belief in his heart that such a thing was possible. But, though his eyes were fixed on his companion's face, he was looking rather at another of noble outline, bent slightly forward, and with great masses of low growing hair upon the forehead. Could he bring Maggie to this? Was not her mind like a blank sheet of paper, to be written across with

any character that he might determine? Was she not capable of being trained to yield this perfect sympathy? So, with one flash of thought he asked himself. To be understood, as he believed, with a sudden and passionate intuition, it was possible to be understood, for one ineffable moment by a girl whose sweetness and strength were great enough to place her in the ranks of womanhood, would be worth living for, aye, and even dying for. The thought caught hold of him as a wild delirium. He longed to pour out some of the nobler aspirations, which at times passed over him as the summer breeze that moves but the petals of the flowers, and the tips of the easily swaying grasses, but has no power to stir their roots. He longed to lay bare those vague hopes and fears, those unformed aspirations, those untutored longings by which in higher moments he was possessed. A sudden thirst for sympathy took hold of him; a craving desire to have a woman's full indrinking eyes turned with highest intelligence

upon his, while the tones of her voice dealt tenderly with his favourite themes, and her face acted as a mirror to his soul.

In those few moments Sidney Aschenburg took a great step forward in life; to have had the blinding light of a new experience flashed upon him; to have gained the proud vantage ground of man's estate; to have seen for himself that a woman of deep receptive nature, tender withal and true, was a nobler creature than any of which his fancies had yet dreamed. And yet he was not thinking of Frances Carter, but of a simple village girl.

Frances sat meanwhile with averted face and downcast eyes, as, like the dawn of a new day, the thought that a bond of perfect sympathy might exist between two human beings, slowly turned from the grey mysterious mist of twilight to opal and rosy splendour, until long shafts of golden light darted athwart the sky. Transfixed and motionless she sat before it, her woman's heart yielding itself up

to its enthralling influence. To meet with one whose being would absorb hers. To yield up her soul that it might merge itself into another, like and yet unlike—higher, that by it she might be lifted nearer to the Divine Light, and yet so low that it could stoop down and understand her in the dust. The soft warm colour spread over the girl's face, and her breath came faster. Could it be that something might some day happen and bring some one to her, whose soul she would recognize as that by which the broken arc of her being would be made whole? Could it be? Her heart beat quicker; a glow as if she had received some quickening power ran through her frame. Was this love? Was this the crowning glory which, as a woman, she might hope some day to find placed upon her head? Had she, she asked herself, unknowingly yearned for it? Had she been waiting and dumbly praying for it since many a long day?

With a deep breath, which was but as the sigh of a little child that lays its head in

the fulness of its satisfaction upon its mother's breast, she raised her eyes, a light shining from their darkened irises; and as she looked into Sidney's face her dream vanished, and she remembered instantly that her abstraction must have been unintelligible to him, perhaps even ungracious and rude.

They had been seated apart from the rest of the company, and Frances seeing a movement made by several of the younger women toward a table covered with engravings, intimated that she would like to join them.

Soon after, a stout dowager, bristling in a brocade of peach-blossom satin, said that with the exception of orchids, she loved prints better than anything else in the world, and the circle which had formed round the table widening for her, she stepped between Sidney Aschenburg and Frances Carter.

Handsome, dignified Mrs. Aschenburg followed in her train, and moving slowly round the table, spoke a word first to one and then to another, until at length she came

back to the point where the dowager stood, when she requested her son to resign the work of turning over the prints to a tall man who was standing near, and bring a portfolio filled with drawings of his own.

Mrs. Aschenburg's manœuvre succeeded; for the circle broke up and again re-formed, with Frances Carter this time standing at her son's side, and lifting the drawings from the case that he held open before her, looking at them in her grave thoughtful way before passing them round.

Presently there was more music; and Sidney was to be seen standing near the piano, where a chair had to be moved, and some loose music to be picked up which had fallen to the floor. The chair had been in Frances Carter's way, and her dress had swept the music to the ground as she turned in answer to some question.

Had he noticed how often that evening he had been by the side of this girl, the only one of his mother's guests who had been a

stranger to him, he would have said that chance had thrown them together. For we are not always conscious of the purely human agency in the working of events, and the actions of his mother during that evening would have had no place in his reckoning.

CHAPTER II.

UNDERCURRENTS.

A WEEK later, and the weather was still bright and clear. The dust was lying upon the roads, and a pale dun coating was upon the grassy sides and hedges, and there were cracks in the dried-up mud at the bottom of the ditches. Yes, the weather would hold, the farmers said, there would be no fear of it breaking unless thunder came. But the thunder did not come, and the sunshine and the breezes continued to do their work.

Matthew had been busy all day in the smithy, but, as had happened often of late, no singing was to be heard, no snatches of song; nothing but the working of

the bellows and the clanging of iron. It is not easy to sing when one's mind is disturbed, and Matthew's had been very much disturbed ever since the night his sister had sat on the smithy hearthstone, and told him of the lover who would only do his wooing secretly. "A chap should stand up fair and speak like a man," he said to himself, "instead of carrying on as if he was afraid of everything but the dark." He had tried to reason with Maggie on the difficulties of her position: he had stripped her story of the little ideal touches which love gave to its recital, and had tried to show it as it appeared to him, in its unadorned reality. He had used persuasion. He had told her of the wrong she was doing her mother by keeping her in ignorance; and how she was working a double injury upon herself, not only through the little acts of deception which were daily forced upon her, but through the closing of a channel by which the advice of one so much more calculated to assist her than a brother, had

been cut off. But it had all been of no avail. And so Matthew had sat up nightly after the others had gone to bed, the candle guttering unheeded at his side, the embers in the grate fading into ashen grey and blackness, while his mind ever occupied itself with the one subject, which he turned, looked at, surveyed from every point of view, but which never changed its proportions, nor altered the deformity of its shape.

On those evenings in the week when Maggie came downstairs dressed for a walk, the basket for carrying wild-flowers hanging over her arm, which it was her excuse to fill, it would have been easy for Matthew to have dogged her steps, and to have seen for himself whom it was she went to meet. But this did not accord with his ideas of honour. He was a simple-minded man, consequently the paths of right and wrong were widely separate to him. An action was either generous or mean, a thing to be spoken well of or to be condemned. Yea was yea to him, and nay, nay. So in this matter of

tracking his sister down, there had never been any question in his mind as to the course which he should pursue. To have gone skulking in the shadows of hedges; to have bent his ear listening for the rolling of a pebble, the snapping of a twig; to have doubled and turned with each varying direction of his sister's steps, and finally to have stood a thief upon her actions, would have been abhorrent to him. He had never, even for a moment, dwelt upon the possibility of such a deed. Maggie had refused to tell him the name of the man she met, as she had refused to give up meeting him, and he had felt baffled and perplexed, as a man will when standing before a door which he cannot unbolt; but it never led to any fine metaphysical inquiries, and the confusing of the lines of what was honourable or dishonourable in his mind.

Then in addition to this anxiety had come the more material one connected with the property which had been left him by his

uncle, and for which he was determined to find the rightful owner. Already five sovereigns had been taken out of the box that he kept beneath his bed, and had been laid down before Mr. Hodgson; more for Matthew's pleasure than that of the lawyer, who had turned his shrewd eyes on the blacksmith and after looking at him attentively for a moment, had waved his hand in deprecation. When five sovereigns are the fruit of many hours' toil, it seems a large sum to pay away: what comes to us easily is of small value; what we have worked for is estimated according to the labour by which it is gained; and Matthew knew that other and much larger sums would have to follow, and that the store of sovereigns would diminish gradually beneath such a drain. Yet he did not begrudge their expenditure; he had carefully thought over everything connected with his uncle's affairs, and it seemed to him that Tom Tindale's widow and child must by some means or other be put into possession of their rights, and that

he was the only man to do it. The lawyer had accepted the monstrous fact of a man refusing to take possession of property that was legally his, but had resented the desire with some impatience that none of the expenses were to be paid out of the estate. To him it had appeared exaggerated and absurd—quixotic, he had called it to his wife, when at dinner he had detailed as many of the circumstances as was consistent with professional reticence. To Matthew, however, the thing was very simple; must a woman and her child be allowed to acquire a property from which they had been wrongfully kept for years, only to find it impoverished, perhaps even valueless, by the very means taken to place it in their hands? Never, Matthew had said, so long as he was above ground. And so he had quietly set himself to the task. But the lawyer had been mistaken in calling him quixotic—he was eminently practical, and although the sovereigns had been taken by him ungrudgingly from their canvas bag, there

had been no foolish romancism in his mind; he knew the difficulty with which money is earned, and he would not have drawn upon his savings unless compelled.

Thus, it was not wonderful, with these things working upon him, that of late Matthew had sung very little in the forge.

It was evening, and he was standing in the doorway of his father's cottage, the rays of the setting sun falling aslant his face. A rose was in his button-hole, and the coat which he wore had had an extra shake; and even his broad-soled country boots had been brushed and the toes darkened with a little blacking. His expression, which latterly had been grave and thoughtful, was more cheerful; the bronzed cheeks were smooth and full, and a smile lurked about the corners of the mouth.

He was going somewhat earlier than usual for his game of quoits—for there were a few men in Staneby with whom harvest-time did not interfere, and who might be counted upon with certainty for the game—but upon step-

ping out of the doorway, instead of keeping to the left side of the road, and so going direct to the Garod Arms, he crossed over, making, so it might have appeared, for the little homestead belonging to Joseph Hind which stands on the edge of the village green.

For twelve or thirteen summers, Joseph Hind's pretty dark-eyed daughter had driven her father's cows every morning and evening past the forge; and although Matthew had been accustomed to nod to her when by chance he had been standing near the door or window, yet it had not been until within the last few months that he had begun to notice her coming and returning. As a little child she would call through the window to him, and unless he were very busy, he never failed to lay aside his hammer and put up a grimy hand to the shelf upon which lay a small paper parcel containing sweets; whereupon a bo-peep kind of play used to go on between them, he telling her the paper was quite empty, while she would laugh, standing

on tip-toe that she might get a closer view of it; and then when she would have snatched it from him, he would raise it far above her head and she would be told to clamber for it, when like a little wild cat she would spring to his shoulder, and twining her tiny arms about him would lock her little hands together and plead that she might have a sweet. There was always some nonsense between them—some game. But that was twelve or thirteen years ago. After that the little girl grew shy and gradually left off asking for sweets, and would bend her head and turn her sun-bonnet so that Matthew could not see her face, even if he were looking from the forge. But as the years went by, pretty Bella Hind got over this childish shyness, and always looked for any of the Tindales who might be near the window or door, that she might nod or speak to them in passing.

It was only within the last few months, however, that Matthew had begun to watch for the trim well-made figure with its light-coloured print bed-gown, its short woolsey

petticoat, its blue home-knitted stockings, and country-made clogs. The cheery "good morning" which Bella gave him began to sound very pleasantly, and he came to look for it as one looks for a beam of sunshine which falls at a certain hour into one's room. There were times too that he made excuses to go to the door, when, if the little rustic figure with its rough hawthorn stick did not come into sight, he would stand for a few minutes in unwonted idleness, hoping that Bella's cows and Bella herself would soon appear. Matthew never troubled himself to inquire when those "good mornings" and "good evenings" had come to be well-marked features of the day. The satisfaction which he found in them came as imperceptibly as the first rays of daylight athwart the sky. He could have said in such a month he cared nothing for them, as we can say at such an hour the dawn had not begun; but when the feeling of satisfaction began to creep into his heart, he would have found it as difficult to

say as to have pointed out at what hour the sky first began to lighten with the coming sun.

As Matthew drew near the low parapet which shut in Joseph Hind's farmyard, his steps became slower, while his eyes went in a swift roving search round the enclosure of the homestead. There were a few fowls which had come in early from the fields, a sheep-dog lying blinking upon an old piece of sacking that had been thrown into a corner, some milk-bowls standing in a row upon a stone bench near the kitchen door, a few towels hanging over the branches of a stunted mountain-ash tree, and a kitten playing with a ball and half-knitted sock which it had pulled down from the bench.

Matthew at length paused in his walking, and, standing close to the low wall, stooped so that his arms might rest upon it. The kitchen door was open, and there came a faint sound from it of the clinking of spoons and basins as though some one were putting

away the remains of the evening meal, and it was toward the door that Matthew turned his head. The little kitten pulled and tossed the blue sock, its tender claws getting at times entangled in the yarn; the fowls gave a lazy scratch and a cluck, cluck to a wandering chicken regardless of Matthew, whose eyes, after that first roving glance, steadily rested upon the one place which had any attraction for them; even the dog gave but one look at the intruder, and then, with a deep sigh, returned to blink over its day-dream of sheep that persistently wandered over the Fell.

Twice Matthew had to turn his head toward the road to bid some passer-by "good evening;" and once, on being asked "what he saw that was so wonderful in Joseph Hind's farmyard," had stumbled in an unwonted manner as he tried to answer the simple question.

At length, appearing to think the time long in which Bella remained coquettishly out of

sight—although it must be confessed Bella had no idea that an admirer was standing ready, as it were, to her hand, or probably she would have come with towel and spoons and said a word from the kitchen doorway—he noiselessly unlatched the gate, and, with a step carefully guarded against sound, went toward the kitten, which at once set up its back and tail, and spit in a way that left no doubt as to the unfriendliness of its spirit. Not to be deterred from carrying out his purpose, he stooped and put out his hand for the half-knitted sock, while the little creature, releasing its claws with some difficulty, darted away with a sidelong progression, its back arched and its tail twice its ordinary size, to take refuge amongst the mallows which grew under the stone bench. Once possessed of the sock, Matthew wound up the unravelled ball, and passed one of the needles through half-a-dozen stitches which had been drawn off in the kitten's gambols, for Matthew was deft of

hand and not wholly ignorant of the mysteries which surround a woman's work. He stopped to listen for the sound which, until that moment, had been coming from the open doorway. Could Bella have gone into another part of the house? or could it be that she had at last caught a glimpse of him, and was standing with smiling lips and sparkling eyes watching him from the shadow of some doorway or window curtain? Either way Matthew would carry out what he intended. So, with eyes twinkling with amusement, he carefully drew the rose from his button-hole and hid it within the sock. Then, placing the ball and piece of knitting far enough upon the bench to be out of the kitten's reach, he stood for a moment listening again for any sound that might come to him from the house. But Bella had gone to change the buff-coloured bed-gown for the brown stuff dress which she usually wore when the day's work was done; and hearing, therefore, no signs of Bella's presence in the

kitchen, he turned and retraced his steps across the yard, unlatching the gate and closing it as quietly as when he came.

It was the trick which Matthew had played with Bella's knitting that caused his eyes to sparkle and his lips to broaden into a smile which showed the strong white teeth. What would Bella say, he was asking himself, when she took up her knitting? Would she recognize the rose as being like the pale pink ones that his mother trained over the doorway at home? Would she guess who had left it? At this thought Matthew gave a low, merry, comfortable sort of laugh. Then he wondered if she would stop and speak of it to him next morning; and whether she would be pleased, or whether, after the manner of women, she would pretend to be vexed with his little act of attention. And here he became puzzled to know whether Bella grateful, or Bella pretending to be angry, would be more charming.

But as Matthew came in sight of the village

inn his thoughts gradually drifted away from pretty Bella Hind, and he began to think about the game of quoits, and to wonder whether he would have the luck that evening of testing his skill with that of Tom Farrar. He raised his right arm as if trying the elasticity of its muscles, and his fingers closed themselves over the palm of his hand.

But a bank of thundery-looking clouds, which had been gradually rising from the south-east, threatened to disappoint him; for even before Matthew could reach the door of the inn several heavy drops of rain splashed upon his face, and the sudden roll of a clap of thunder broke above his head.

A group of men were in front of the Garod Arms; some seated upon the overturned stone trough, and others, desirous of a better vantage ground, upon the wall which ran round the stable-yard. Foremost amongst those who were standing was the shoemaker, who, with dirty hands thrust into the folds of the black calico apron which he wore twisted round his

waist, was asserting that he would not mind standing up with any man they liked to name, and he would bet an ounce of tobacco that, if they would see fair play done by him, he would make the first "ringer."

"Well, here's Mattha," exclaimed several voices; "hev a turn wi' him."

Neddy Kendal had his back toward the green, but upon hearing these words he swung round on his heel to look at the blacksmith; then, turning to those whom he addressed, said sulkily, while a scowl came over his face—

"Well, I'se ready to stick to my word. An ounce of tobacco that I make the first 'ringer'—only fair play mind."

"It'll be fair play if ye stand up with Mattha," chorused half a dozen speakers at once.

"What's that?" cried the owner of the name, just coming up.

"Nay, nay, it's nothing," asserted Tom Farrar, in a tone loud enough to be heard

above the voices which were beginning to explain matters. "It's just Neddy who's wantin' all the fun to hissel. He's one o' them folks that'll be standin' on their feet when other folks is lying on their backs in the churchyard." And here the inn-keeper laughed in order that this remark might be received as a joke by his hearers.

"Aye, he's a rare un to drive his own cart, is Neddy," said a voice from the wall.

The shoemaker turned fiercely round to find out who had spoken. But as each rustic face wore a broad grin, and each pair of horny hands began at the same moment to raise their owner into a more secure or comfortable position, Neddy Kendal looked in vain for the offender.

"Mebbe ye'd like to manage things for me yersels?" he asked derisively. "Ye'd mebbe like to hev everything in yer own han's?"

"Now then, my lads," broke in Tom Farrar's voice, as he came out of the house

with the quoits. "We toss up for who's to play. Them's t' rules." So saying, he elbowed his way through the men toward the space of ground allotted to the game. "Now then, Neddy, ye mun stand by a bit; it isn't your turn, ye know. Ye hed first go off last night."

But even while the inn-keeper spoke, the drops of rain, which had fallen at intervals, came with greater frequency; and before arrangements could be made for playing, the thunder-clouds, which had risen suddenly over the village, began to pour out their contents with such violence that the group of men fled precipitately. The occupants of the wall were the last to give up their position, braving the storm for several minutes with upturned coat-collars, and heads put close together; but at length they too were obliged to take refuge in the Garod Arms. There was much pushing and crowding one upon another in the endeavour to look out upon the pouring rain. The shoemaker, being

naturally amongst the first to avail himself of the most comfortable shelter, was the farthest from the door; Bill Taylor of the long limbs was just within the threshold; while Matthew Tindale's shoulder caught the dripping from the eaves.

"It'll not clear to-night," remarked the village butcher, a man with a broad, good-tempered face, surrounded by a fringe of sandy hair. "I think we'd better make it glasses an' pipes."

"Aye," agreed several voices; "we'd better turn in."

"What do you say, Mattha?" asked Bill Taylor.

"I'm for quoits; an' if I can't get quoits I'm going home. There's a bit o' work that I've promised for Derth'aite, an' I may as well do 't now as get up to 't by four to-morrow morning."

"If it's for young Mr. Aschenburg ye needn't bother with it. The house is full o' company, an' I guess he's too busy to mind his fallerals."

It was Tom Farrar who said this, and pushed his burly frame nearer the door. He did not like to hear the quoit players talk of going: there was ale to be drunk and tobacco to be sold on the premises.

"It'll clear out, ye may depend on't," he continued, as he lifted up his heavy double chin from his dog-eared collar and peered out at the darkened sky. "It'll clear out, Mattha, there isn't a doubt."

"Who says it's going to rain all night?" asked a shrill voice suddenly from the end of the kitchen.

"Nobody," answered the landlord in a testy tone. "It's only Mattha 'at says he's got work to do." And then with a sudden assumption of good humour, he added, "Here, I say, missis, just bring us some ale. I don't mind saying I'll stand glasses round."

In a few minutes Mrs. Farrar came elbowing her way toward the door, a tray with glasses in one hand and a huge brown jug in another. When she had got rid of both ale

and glasses, she paused in the space which had been made for her, her sharp grey eyes running from one face to another, and the row of projecting under-teeth trembling with something of the eagerness of a beast of prey.

"Which of you is in such a hurry to go, when there's ale like that to be drunk," she began in a jocular tone.

"It wasn't me," returned the butcher, as he raised his glass to his lips. "I've known the taste o' your ale too long, missis. Well, here's yer health, an' may I live to see it."

Mrs. Farrar put the jug on the ground and propped up the tray against her petticoats; then with her bony arms folded, and her red knuckles hidden in the folds of her sleeves, she turned to Matthew Tindale.

"So it was you, was it, 'at had such plenty to do at home that ye couldn't spare an hour amongst yer neighbours." The speaker meant to preserve a certain outward show of good-humour.

"I've a bit o' work to finish for Derth'aite, if ye mean that," was the blacksmith's calm reply. "An' if I don't get it done to-night I'll hev to be at it early to-morrow morning."

"It's because they're grand folks, I suppose?" And as Mrs. Farrar asked this question she sniffed contemptuously.

"All folk are alike to me, whether they're rich or poor. If I make a promise to them I keep it."

"Yes, Mattha, I'll back ye for that," put in Bill Taylor.

"The missis can tell ye a bit o' news about young Aschenburg if she likes," put in the landlord, who was always ready to interfere when there were signs of wrangling. "Tell him what one o' the grooms told ye this afternoon in passing." And Tom Farrar took his hands from his trouser pockets where they had begun to turn over the coppers, and patted his wife's arm encouragingly.

"Why, bless us, that isn't a thing to interest men folk." And Mrs. Farrar turned

her thin pale face, with its trembling under-jaw and bright grey eyes, upon her husband.

"Yes it is. We like a bit o' gossip just as well as you do."

Matthew was slowly drinking his ale and looking out every now and again at the weather, indifferent as to what Mrs. Farrar might have to say to him.

"Have ye heard tell o' what's going to happen at Derth'aite?"

Matthew's eyes came back in a tranquil way to the speaker's face, but he did not say anything.

"John Peacock told me this afternoon that there's fuss enough going on up at Derth'aite for anything. And unless he's mistaken, and Mr. Sparkes and everybody else, there'll be a wedding sooner than folks thinks of."

"Well, I suppose it's right enough," returned Matthew indifferently, wiping his mouth on his coat sleeve and placing his empty glass in Mrs. Farrar's outstretched fingers.

"Yes, it's right enough. Tell Maggie about it"—and here the quivering, protruding jaw seemed to set itself jeeringly—"an' say if she's a mind, her an' me will go an' look on at t' weddin'."

A faint flush suddenly spread itself over Matthew's cheeks and brow, and he looked down searchingly at the speaker.

A spirit of devilry takes hold sometimes of women when recklessly they have said things scarcely bearing to themselves a precise meaning, but which a quick perceptive sense sees to be fraught with the sharpness of a two-edged sword to others; they will follow up the chance advantage which they have won in a hap-hazard kind of way, and strike the harder with remarks that are kindred and more intense. Wholly ignorant of the secret power that lies in their words, they are yet satisfied with their visible effect.

"Yes, Maggie 'll be interested: she'll hev a deal to say about this wedding of young Mr. Aschenburg's," continued Mrs. Farrar. Then

with a burst of shrill laughter, she added, "Mebbe she'll forbid t' bands."

The blacksmith had set his mouth firmly, his eyes looking at the woman before him with a gaze of fiercest scrutiny, while the flush upon his face deepened. An idea that was strange to him had come into his mind.

"Sec a look, Mattha! Ye might be quality, and Maggie might hev set her heart upon being mistress o' Derth'aite."

"Whisht, whisht!" broke in the landlord. "I never saw such folk as women are. A pity their tongues is a little bit too short, or I'd bet something they'd hang theirselves."

"There's some that could do that," put in Bill Taylor, his long legs stretched out to prop his body against the door-post, and a piece of straw which he had found in his pocket projecting from his mouth.

"Now then, none o' your impidence." And Mrs. Farrar's eyes rested a moment on the speaker before turning to Matthew to make a

last stab at what she was accustomed to call the pride of the Tindales. Then, smoothing the bottom of the glass which the blacksmith had handed to her on her open palm, she said, with forced composure, "What I say of Maggie I say because of her airs and graces, and not because I think her any better than mysel'."

"I think you women would like to see nobody good-looking but us men," interposed Tom Farrar; "there would be peace then, I reckon."

The men near the door broke into a laugh, first one voice giving a rustic opinion and then another. The shoemaker elbowed his way toward the door, and offered his opinion in a manner which was more than usually offensive. He was good-humouredly seized upon, though in a way which expressed real dissent, and was pushed by half-a-dozen lusty arms out into the rain.

Matthew had moved off the door-step and further into the kitchen, in order to get out of

the way of the struggling group. An idea had taken possession of him that fairly cauterized his brain. He must get away from the Garod Arms and think quietly over everything that had been said; it was possible that in the hurry of the moment he had misjudged its purport. So looking over the shoulders of the men who were blocking up the doorway, and seeing that the steadily pouring rain afforded him a sufficient reason for leaving the inn, he turned up his coat-collar, and calling to Tom Farrar above the laughter and din of voices that he was going home, began to edge his way toward the door.

"Why, min, ye'll get wet through afore ye can reach t' smithy," called the landlord, bringing his portly person from the farthest end of the kitchen, where he had gone for the boxes of snuff and tobacco.

"Nay, Mattha, stay and hev a pipe," cried half-a-dozen voices, and there was a general pressure of the occupants of the kitchen toward the blacksmith.

"Not to-night. Smoking's an uneasy job to me when I've work on hand."

So saying Matthew stepped into the pouring rain, his jacket buttoned across his chest, his hat pressed over his ears, and his chin well settled into the upturned collar. He strode with the ease of one possessed of great physical strength toward the road that led past Joseph Hind's to the smithy, his feet sinking into the softened turf of the village green, his eyes bent on the path before him, and his arms loosely swinging at his sides.

The idea which had started up into life under the landlady's words grew with him until he was fretted and tortured, while behind the phantom came its horrible shadow in the belief that Mrs. Farrar knew Sidney Aschenburg to be Maggie Tindale's lover. But in this, at least, he was wrong; the woman had but spoken at random, though she had used the bitterest words her tongue dared frame.

CHAPTER III.

WILL HE BE TRUE?

THE farmers who said that the weather would break with thunder were wrong in their prophesyings, for the next day few traces remained of the thunderstorm which had swept over Staneby. The dust was laid upon the roads, the pale dun coating was washed off the grassy sides and hedges, the cracks in the dried-up mud at the bottom of the ditches were closed, and the green leaves and grass held up their heads and were refreshed—this was what the storm had done, nothing but good and no harm, and very soon the sunshine and breezes continued to hold their own again.

It was the third week in August—ten more days and the month would be out.

The breezes and sunshine had done their work upon the cornfields: the stems were like slender shafts of gold, and the heads of the grain swung heavily. So suddenly did this come to pass, that it seemed almost as if the farmers and work-people awakened one morning to find that there was to be no more idle time, and the scythes must be got out and made ready. The women put on their short wincey skirts and bed-gowns, and tilting their sun-bonnets over their eyes, set off from the village, their numbers increasing as they passed the out-lying cottages, and gradually lessening as they broke off into groups of threes and fours into the fields. The girls who were to be band-makers loitered in talkative groups behind their mothers: while the boys, wishing to show their dignity and freedom, took care to be far ahead.

It was a very busy time among the men and women and children; the hot August

sun poured down upon their heads, while the rustling stems of the precious crops ever grew drier and drier. Parched lips were plied oftener to the tin cans that stood in shady corners of the fields, and brown hands and arms were rubbed oftener across the sweat-laden brows and cheeks. It was grand harvest weather! Every one about Staneby said that such had not been seen for years. And there was going out early and coming in late, until the lanes began to show signs that the corn was being carried, pale yellow trophies hanging on the branches of low growing trees, and fringes like those upon royal garments bordering the dog-rose and bramble hedges.

It was a bright still evening. The birds had forgotten that autum was near and were singing right merrily; and in the air there was the faint hum of insects, and the sound of voices from the distant corn-fields and the creaking of heavily laden carts as they passed along the lanes.

Maggie had stolen out a little earlier than usual to meet her lover, and was sitting tranquilly waiting for him within the doorway of a ruined hut that stood in one corner of the quarry, her hands lying idly in her lap, her head resting against the wooden lintel, and her eyes lifted to the sky which still glittering with light, stretched above her.

A smile crept over her face and her eyelids drooped. Of what was she thinking? Last time they had met he had called her his Rose of June. To-night would there be a new name? Would he find new things to say to her, new tender things that for ever after would be treasured in her heart? A few weeks ago she had wept, sitting alone in the quarry because he had not come. The shadows had deepened, and eight o'clock had sounded from the belfry tower of Staneby Hall, and she had actually been foolish enough to allow a sob to escape her, just as though his absence were not quite easy to understand.

How silly to have trembled and to have been full of doubt, when he was certain to come next day and explain it all. And Maggie almost laughed aloud at the recollection of her trouble.

How beautiful and sweet were those long-drawn moments in which she waited till he came. A deep happiness stole over her and she grew quiet and still; it was as if her soul stood in broad meadows—a golden noonday above her head—the hum of insects, the scent of flowers about her—while past her glided a placid stream upon whose bosom lay a vision of the sky.

Ten minutes afterwards Sidney lay stretched on the short undergrowth in front of Maggie; his chin resting on one hand, his elbow planted securely in the yielding turf, while with the other hand he impatiently plucked up the blades of grass. He had been annoyed to find Maggie was the first at the quarry, for he wished to make some outward show of impatience to meet her; he had been annoyed

at her rising from her seat—continually trying to bring to mind differences in their position, he said to himself—and further, by the almost imperceptible curtsey which, in defiance of all admonitions, she had made to him.

"I never knew you to be so silent, Maggie. If you could but know how I have been bored to death for the last hour, I think you would try to find some pretty little speeches to make to me." This Sidney said after a somewhat lengthy silence, his eyes turned moodily away from his companion, while his fingers never ceased the restless plucking up of the grass.

"Mebbe the things that I could talk about would not interest you, sir;" was the response spoken slowly and hesitatingly. Sidney had taken her in his arms when they had met, and had kissed her affectionately—keeping back an impatient exclamation when she curtsied to him. But this she could not know, for he had set himself determinedly to be kind to her—and had pulled her ear playfully, and had asked her where the pretty roses on her cheeks

had come from. Nevertheless, Maggie felt that the state of happiness in which she had waited for the coming of her lover, had in some way come to an end.

"Well, let me hear what you have to say." And Sidney motioned to her with his hand. He was lying so far away from her, that he could not have touched the nearest border of her gown, save with difficulty.

"I can only tell of the things that go on at home," began Maggie, thus adjured, "mother has hed another sitting of eggs come out this morning, and if we manage to rear them that'll make sixty chickens that we've hed this year."

"Yes?" returned Sidney absently.

"An' mother thinks if she can manage to get a good market for them before Christmas sets in," continued Maggie, gaining confidence, "it would be a fine thing, for it's such an expense keepin' fowls over winter. And then you see she could rig us up with new bedding

out of her own earnings; the blankets hev got to be as thin as thin."

Sidney made no answer; he merely lifted his eyes with troubled abstraction from the waving grasses on the other side of the quarry to a patch of sky that was gleaming between the trees. He had not heard her speak.

Maggie felt as if she had almost exhausted her subject, and added in an uncertain tone, for she was not quite sure that she was being listened to, that Matthew and her father were going to buy the blankets if her mother were not able to manage it out of her own earnings.

The abstracted eyes came slowly round to Maggie's face, and by reason of an effort that Sidney made with himself, a look of greater interest came into them, and he smiled faintly as he asked her to tell him something now about herself.

"About me, sir?" and the colour rose and swept over the girl's face like a summer's

dawn. "I've nothing to tell you about myself."

"Have you not? What would you do supposing—mind I am only saying supposing," and the speaker laid a stress on the word, "what would you do if anything came in the way and prevented us meeting here?"

The colour on the girl's beautiful face deepened, and her eyes filled with trouble as she looked down into those which were being lifted to hers; but she did not speak.

"Come, Maggie, I only said supposing?"

"Oh, don't let us talk of such a thing. If it's never really to happen, if it's only 'supposing,' what's the good of it."

"It is a good thing to take one's thoughts out of the old grooves occasionally. It does not do to go on thinking that this state of affairs will last for ever."

"What do you say, sir? I don't understand." And Maggie's heart bounded, and there came a sudden pause of all thought in her.

"Come, don't look like that at me, or I shall remember those great mournful eyes, and think of them more than I shall care about to-night. I only want you for once to take a common-sense view of things. I want you to look over the hedge of this fool's Paradise. That is all; surely not a thing at which you need take alarm."

"I don't understand you, sir," repeated Maggie helplessly, her face slowly whitening, while the troubled expression in her eyes gave way to one of fear.

"Oh, Maggie, don't be so terribly prosaic, and so terribly in earnest." And Sidney tried to give a playful laugh. "Can't you imagine things happening to you, and plan what you will say and do, without believing that they are going to take place?"

"No, sir, I can't. It makes me turn sick and queer like—at least when they're such things as us never meeting here."

"Oh, Maggie, Maggie! Poor little woman." And something that was half a sigh, half a

groan followed these words. Here Sidney drew nearer to the girl. His manner showed some impatience, and upon his face there was still a look of abstraction, as half-reluctantly he held a hand toward her.

And as Maggie stooped to fold her own round it, one of the roses which she wore fastened by her brooch slipped, and fell just in front of Sidney Aschenburg. Once when a sprig of heather had fallen from the bosom of her dress, Sidney had caught it up, and touching it with his lips had laid it between the leaves of his pocket-book. Now, the flower which had dropped from its nestling place against the delicate white throat, scarcely attracted his notice, and Maggie remembering what he had done with the sprig of heather, felt a sudden chill and sighed.

They sat silently hand in hand for several minutes, and then Maggie asked if he wanted to go home.

"Not particularly," was the abrupt answer.

Sidney had started at the question, and as

one who forcibly brings his thoughts from other objects, looked up at her; then drawing himself yet nearer, lifted up his hand and caressed the cheek which flushed so eloquently beneath his touch.

"Poor little rustic thing," he said compassionately. Then, with a sudden rush of feeling—"Maggie, my pet."

The rough coarse hand closed more tightly over the smooth white palm, and Maggie leaned toward him as though, but for womanly shyness, she would have folded him in her embrace.

To Sidney the recollection of the touch of a hand which rested morning and evening for a moment within his own came to him, and imagination laying it within his palm, his fingers closed convulsively over the roughened one which was beneath his own, the pressure being so great that a low cry of pain was wrung from Maggie's lips.

"What is it, Maggie, my darling?" he exclaimed, drawing her hand with a hasty

protective action against his bosom. "What is it? What made you give that piteous little cry?"

His heart had not wandered so far that a sound of distress from her lips could not call it back.

"Have I been too rough with you? Poor little hand that should be soft and white and have no scars upon it. Maggie, my darling, will you believe me when I tell you that if it lay in the power of mortal to shield another from every care and injury by laying down the best ten years of life, I would do it for you."

Maggie stooped down to meet the upturned face, and putting her cheek against Sidney's, murmured in passionate tones—

"I believe it because you tell me. I believe it because I do not think you would lie to me. I believe it because I would give my whole life for you. I would willingly die if I could make you happy."

She was speaking from the deep fount of

womanhood, which, welling up to her lips, overflowed in a wave of emotion, and reached, as the emotions from such a fount will ever reach, the manhood of Sidney Aschenburg. For a moment, the passion which had held him beneath its sway during the early summer months, once more kindled and leapt into a flame in his bosom, and kneeling beside her, he folded his arms round her, and pressed his lips for one hurried fleeting moment to hers. And then as suddenly as he had taken hold of her did he let her slip from his embrace, and springing to his feet, with one hand tightly clenched, while with the other he shaded his eyes, gradually bringing it down with heavy pressure upon the lower part of his face, he wrestled with his emotions. It seemed to him as if whole minutes were passing, and as if the black deafening wings that beat about his head would never slack their attack. At length came a ray of light, and the blood surged less swiftly through his veins, and he began once more to see and hear distinctly.

It was then he took a step toward Maggie, not knowing that it was but a moment since he had left her side.

"Little woman," he said, stooping over her, "you love me too much." He stopped as if under a sudden revulsion of feeling, and then went on tenderly as before. "I am unworthy of you; but I am trying to do right; you will always think, Maggie, my pet, that I have tried to do right?"

But Maggie made no answer; only looked up at him with the light of his kiss in her eyes.

"And now we must go home, you and I. The nights are getting chilly and damp, and I would not have you take cold. Give me your hand. There, we will walk side by side to the opening of the quarry. And now one kiss, my darling. You will go home quickly, will you not? Do not linger in this heavy dew."

A few minutes later Sidney was springing up the steep sides of the quarry, and catching

hold of the lower branches of the birch trees, by which he soon reached the broken edge. And Maggie, with down-hanging head and arms, and steps that were beginning to quicken, was going along the old cart road toward the lower slope of the wood. Oh, how happy she was, she was telling herself again and again; how happy she was in her love! And she began to run, one hand raised to her heaving bosom, her eyes turned upon the petals of her roses which were fluttering to the ground one by one, and marking the track of her footsteps as they fell.

CHAPTER IV.

WAKING THOUGHTS.

THE dawn was slowly creeping over the valley, and the broad shadow thrown by the Pennine ranges was shrinking to the foot of the hills. The mist, which as a phantom lake spread over the low-lying lands, was rising and dispersing in a thin white haze. A long shaft of sunlight threw into relief one portion; each white-washed cottage, each gabled farm-house, each cluster of trees with its clearly-defined line of sunshine and shade, until with a burst of splendour the sun cleared the last cloud, and filled the space between the eastern and western horizon with light.

And as across the landscape, so did the

dawn of early morning steal into Sidney Aschenburg's room. Gloomy pillars of darkness lurked awhile in the corners and round the massive furniture, but these slowly faded away, their towering, unshapely forms dissolving into delicate, transparent shadows that strove to hide themselves in nooks and crannies, until at length the room was filled with a soft light; the first beam of sunshine shot between the folds of the hanging draperies and across the face of the sleeper, who turned beneath it as though half disturbed by the touch of a caressive hand.

As Sidney moved, conscious thought struggled into existence, feebly at first, and barely strong enough to lift him from the stupor of forgetfulness. At length the night of sleep rolled from his brain, and quicker than the dawn had crept over the face of inanimate nature, the consciousness of existence flashed upon him, and the cosmos, the inner world that was hidden within himself lay beneath

his view in the thin mists which a moment's thought would dispel.

What was that vague feeling of uneasiness — that delicious sense of happiness — that trouble and worry, unrest and joy which clothed his senses?

As he lay back on his pillow with widely-opened eyes, the remembrance of his interview the evening before with Maggie came to his mind, and a sharp sting went through him, and he moved his arms uneasily from beneath the coverlet, and clasping one hand within the other flung them with an action of despair above his head. How could her simple heart yield him the response which his own in one mighty stride of life, as it seemed to him, had suddenly stood in need? How could her nature, pure and innocent though it was—and never purer and more innocent had it appeared to him than in that morning hour—how could her nature comprehend his with its infinite perplexities and enfoldings? How could he ever hope to

drain a draught of sympathy from those violet eyes, loving, tender, and true as he had ever found them? How could he ever hope to raise her thoughts into something like comprehension of his own? How ever lay bare his soul to her's, and seek for a bond of union in return?

The uplifted arms were cast down with a gesture as impatient, and as expressive of despair, as when the hands had been joined and raised above the head. A long, deep breath followed, which sounded through the room, and then there was a sharp sound as of teeth being suddenly clenched together. Now a restless movement of the figure on the bed, succeeded by the quick motion of an arm, which drew back one of the bed-curtains with a sharp rattle. Sidney raised himself on his elbow, and looked with troubled eye and gloomy brow toward the shafts of light which pierced the openings of blinds and curtains.

Another day, he said to himself, another day, which if he chose might be bounded by

a meeting with a village girl. How many mornings when his whole being had quivered with this thought; when the long, bright hours of sunshine had threatened to be too many on his hands; when the day itself had been full of weariness till night came! And now?

Sidney passed one hand over his forehead to push off a lock of hair which was damp with the dew of sleep, and his eyes closed with the puckering lines of trouble about their corners, while his lips were drawn together with the tension of mental pain. Of late the face of another woman had risen up fitfully before him, coming unbidden and undesired, hanging like a jewel upon the vacant air. Her voice lingered in his memory, and an inward repetition of her words, looks, and phrases had begun to hold him enthralled.

The tumultuous turmoil which a new emotional experience will cause now worked within him. He was thinking with a pang of those delirious feelings of joy which of late had taken possession of him, as for the first

time he had looked down that vista, where far-off he dimly discerned that beautiful ideal, the union of soul with soul. It was a thing that had been outside his reckoning, a thing of which he had had no knowledge. With the suddenness of a revelation it had come to him, and he had fallen prone before it as one entranced.

At one moment he felt that to be understood by the girl whose acquaintance could only be reckoned by days—nay, almost hours—would be worth the living for—nay, even worth the dying. He longed in a wild, passionate, ecstatic way for her sympathy. He yearned for her voice to be speaking upon his favourite themes—for her face to be imaging the feelings which played across his soul.

Then came a revulsion, and he asked himself if he were awakening from that iridescent dream in which he had been living for the last three months. Could it be that Maggie was growing less dear to him, and that pos-

sibly the time was approaching when the charms which she had had for him would lose their power? Would those meetings in the quarry wood with that new influence, which, in spite of himself, had begun to work in his veins, still continue to give a piquancy to his life? Would Maggie's face, as he could recall it upturned to his, the warm blushes chasing each other with fleeting swiftness from cheek to temple, from temple to the soft white ear, the eyes liquid and revealing the depths of her pure soul to his, the lips parted in the half-sad, half-regretful smile—would it always have the power to hold his thoughts entranced? These questions were followed by a sharp twinge of conscience; and, as a rider who turns his swerving horse once more to the obstacle before it, Sidney tried to face the thought which stared at him, that to reject forcibly the love which he himself had sought and won, would be base, dishonourable, and cruel.

The thought was one Sidney could not

permit himself to harbour. Was it not possible that he was exaggerating his offence? After all, what he had done, thousands in his position had done before as a matter of course: it was almost, he came to persuade himself, a normal episode in the life of such as he.

It was the hour of the morning that was to blame; thoughts that come at such a time are exaggerated and grotesque like the long shadows, quite unlike the simple ones we are accustomed to see in the full light of day. Confound it; if he could only get up, dress, and go downstairs and meet his fellows, he could easily banish such fancies. The room began to feel like a prison, and he tossed about as though the troubles on his mind were so many fetters on his limbs, from which he was trying to escape.

It was beginning to be clear to him that, if he stayed at Derthwaite, a complexity of circumstances would sweep him toward a swirling vortex. That morning—now a good many

weeks ago—when he had ridden over the moor on Harkaway, it had been easy to quieten himself with the thought that he could let events drift with himself and Maggie, until some social distraction came which would serve as a reason for breaking off their intimacy, and excuse him at the same time from any charge of unkindness. It had been so easy to imagine a thousand little diversions and ties which would readily and naturally separate him from her. Now, however, when the diversion was likely to come and in a form upon which he had never calculated, a curious foreboding lay hold of him that he would be freed by a new love, which would spread over him its white wings, and crush beneath it the flower that had come but of selfishness and vanity, only to find that while his heart was withdrawn from its thraldom to Maggie, the voice of duty was making itself more clamorously heard.

Again Sidney's teeth were closed fiercely,

and he flung one arm with a despairing gesture across his eyes. There was but one thing to be done he told himself. He must get away from Derthwaite. He must put miles of sea and land between himself and Frances Carter. He must rid himself of her influence; he must forget it. He must unlearn the trick by which her voice could sound at any moment on his ear. He must put from him the recollection of words and phrases, the very turns of thought which had come to be associated with her. He must try to get back into his old careless fashion of taking life before she came to Derthwaite. And how could these things be effected but by getting away from her?

Sidney lay pondering on the thought. If he went away, and went suddenly, there would be the gain of parting from Maggie without explanation or leave-taking. Sidney could excuse this unkindness to himself by the thought that it was to be done for the sake of the greater good of his remaining

faithful to her. He blinded himself to the fact that there lurked behind such a course the hope of freeing himself from the embarrassments which he saw were closing round him. To remain faithful to her was a convenient phrase, and one that had often passed through his mind of late. It acted as a sedative when uneasy thoughts came, and was yet sufficiently vague in itself to bring no troublesome reflections. He wanted to do two things which are sometimes difficult of combination. He wanted to behave honourably toward the girl, and yet he wanted his own mode of life to remain unaltered; and by the use of this phrase he endeavoured to delude himself into the belief that all was going well with him.

It is wonderful how easily, when we wish to be satisfied with ourselves, things of honourable mention and things which we would fain forget fall just into the very position, in our mental view of things, which we desire. So by degrees that willingness to be away from

Derthwaite, in order to escape from the embarrassments of his connection with Maggie, got so far into the background of Sidney's thoughts that he ceased to be conscious of it, and would have started if the idea could have suddenly obtruded itself. He would go away, that he might remain free for her; he would go away that he might escape from that atmosphere of enchantment which had of late surrounded each most trivial word, each most common act of life at Derthwaite. He would be free, he told himself with sudden determination, his mental attitude supporting his words; he would keep himself free in order to meet any claims Maggie might make upon him.

And as Sidney came to this determination a thrill ran through him, followed by a pleasant sense of exhilaration. It is so easy when we are young to believe in the generosity of our own actions, and to find in them no distorted ray of selfishness. Later in life experience makes us suspicious of them, and we know,

alas! too often, that our fairest deeds are flushed with the rose colour of self-love. And so Sidney plumed himself upon his magnanimity, upon the nobility of this sudden resolution, which was prompting him to flee from an influence which had already become sweet, in order that he might keep some semblance of love for a village girl. It was an honourable and commendable thing to do; moreover, it was plucky. What other man of his acquaintance, he would like to know, would run off from a woman in his own station, and set his feelings at defiance for a chimera?

Now if there is one thing more than another which a young Englishman likes to think he possesses, it is that particular moral characteristic denominated "pluck"; and, therefore, so soon as the idea occurred to Sidney Aschenburg that to leave Derthwaite and Frances Carter would show a certain amount of this much-to-be-desired moral commodity, then he made up his mind he would

go at once. He would leave Derthwaite that very day. He would like to ride rough-shod over his own feelings; there would be a kind of excitement about it. Of course his mother would throw obstacles in the way, and probably Mr. Aschenburg would try to prevent it; but he could explain to them how he had already been at home much longer than he intended, and that, if it were to be worth while going away before the winter set in, he must go at once. He reflected that his movements were usually erratic enough for this sudden resolution of his to pass unobserved.

The pleasant sense of exhilaration, and the belief that he was about to act a noble and disinterested part, asserted themselves keenly with Sidney, and became deepened and strengthened when he got up and dressed.

CHAPTER V.

GOOD-BYE.

SIDNEY waited until breakfast was over before he communicated his intention of leaving Derthwaite that day, either to his mother or to Mr. Aschenburg. The former flushed a little, and raised her delicate eyebrows before she made any reply, and then assented briefly, remarking that she hoped he would not forget that several shooting parties had been arranged for the first week in October. With Mr. Aschenburg he did not escape quite so easily, and had to answer many questions, in which was infused a spirit of didacticism. However, the young man had made up his mind as to what course he intended to pursue; and no

moral force, such as either his mother or Mr. Aschenburg could have used, would have been likely to restrain him.

He had seen Frances Carter only at the breakfast-table, and still with the mood of elation and false heroism upon him, he sought to know her whereabouts from the maid-servants, determining that he would himself tell her of his intended departure. Two things led him to desire this; first, the deep inward craving for her presence, which had become more intensified since he had realized the fact that in a few hours he would be parted from her; secondly, a rebellious, wild kind of hope, which so fast as it sprang up within his breast was as hastily thrust back again, that she might betray by some sign of word, gesture, or expression, that she was not wholly indifferent to him, a hope which if harboured he felt would be traitorous to the motive by which he deluded himself he was leaving Derthwaite. He did not want this hope to rise up in definite proportions before him, it

would have made him at war against himself. For Sidney Aschenburg, in spite of the thought which had been so resolutely hidden behind every other as to be forgotten by him, that to be away from Derthwaite might mean not only a present, but a permanent escape from the consequences of his mad folly with the blacksmith's daughter, was yet honestly desirous of being worthy of her confidence and trust. He was selfish and greatly valued his own ease, yet there was a point at which he would yield it up for honour. Like many a far wiser man, he wanted things which were incompatible in themselves; he wanted to be free from Maggie, yet he wanted to act uprightly by her; he wanted—and ah! in this lay the very gist of the thing—he wanted to leave her honourably, according to his code of honour, that without any backward throw of memory he might woo and win the girl whom, in spite of all the efforts he had made to blind himself to the contrary, he knew he was beginning to love with a love which paled

and put to shame the selfish passion by which he had been carried away in the early summer months.

He went along the terrace in front of the house, to the small garden shut in on the east and north by a band of trees. It was here the great glass conservatory stood, where he had been told Frances Carter might probably be found.

On opening the door, a slight rustling at the farther end of the house, and the gleam of a pale pink coral dress showing through the leaves, told him that he had already come upon the object of his search.

Frances was bending over some low growing plant, and intently examining its leaves.

Not a very wonderful thing surely were it to be found that a man living for some weeks under the same roof, had fallen in love with her. There is such rich promise in the thoughtful face; the depths of the lustrous grey eyes seem to be so full of understanding; the mouth impresses one so strangely with its

truthfulness and loyalty, and with a sense of the bravery of the kisses which it could bring.

Surely, lucky will be the man who wins her. A girl who will be sweetest wife and sweetest mother. She will look like one of the grave-eyed Madonnas, with tiny arms twining about her neck and a baby soul clinging to hers, while across the face of the man she loves will have fallen a light as from the overshadowing of a tall white lily: there will be the touch of her caressing hand, the uplifting of soft white lids, and a glance fleeting and scarcely to be observed, that shall dart like the ray of a sunbeam to the man's soul. One feels confident that no overweening love from him will spoil the sweetness of her nature; it will but grow and thrive under its sunny warmth. And if anguish beat upon them both, the man with his arms cast round her, will feel the warmth of her brave heart, and be thus protected from the benumbing chill of the storm. A perfect marriage—a marriage such as one may dream of.

Sidney loitered toward her, vexed to find that the colour was deepening in his face, and that his thoughts, which before had been clear enough as to what he was going to say when he found Frances, were now hopelessly confused. Even when she looked up with a slight start on becoming aware of his approach, and made some common-place observation about the loveliness of the morning and the attractiveness of the flowers, he could only mutter almost incoherent nothings, halting expressions of delight at the perfection of the weather, and at the beauty of the plants. Then he became silent, and with a gesture of impatience, thrust both his hands into the pockets of his coat, drawing them forward, as he endeavoured to regain his ordinary self-possession.

"I don't know anything of plants—in fact I am perfectly ignorant about them," remarked Frances with an equanimity which was provoking to her companion.

Sidney turned away from her a little and

began fingering a fern leaf, conscious that he could not at that moment meet unabashed the clear glance of the girl.

"Mrs. Aschenburg told me to come here whenever I liked," Frances continued, seeing that the burden of the conversation was left to her; "and you see I take her at her word. I find myself here pretty nearly at all hours of the day."

"Really." Sidney was chafed that his companion could speak to him so easily, and half angry with her for keeping to this stupid subject of the flowers. So, quite abruptly, and with a feeling of grim satisfaction that perhaps he would be able to say something that would disturb her, he jerked out the fact that he was leaving Derthwaite that day, and had been looking for her in order that he might say good-bye.

An expression of astonishment passed over the girl's face; then, with the colour deepening in it, she waited with a look of inquiry for a further explanation.

"I must go away," continued Sidney. "I must get away from here—business and many things call me."

Was it because he saw an almost indefinable change in the expression of her face, a softening of the muscles round the mouth, a sympathetic look of regret in the grey eyes, that made him forget his embarrassment? No matter. For some reason or other he lost the awkwardness that had characterized his bearing since his entrance to the conservatory; his words no longer came clumsily from his lips, and the flush that was still upon his face was forgotten.

"I came here because I wanted to say goodbye to you before I left—I did not want to do it where everybody would be crowding round for a last word."

Sidney let go the fern leaf, and raising his hand above his head, laid it upon the trunk of a palm tree, and leaned against it as if for support. He looked very handsome in his suit of light fawn, a crimson carnation fast-

ened in his button-hole. He had not forgotten Maggie; she was a distinct reality to him; neither did the idea fade from his mind, that he was leaving Derthwaite that he might be free for her. That had a firm hold upon him; he was not likely at that moment to forget it or to swerve from it: he would be faithful to it, but at the same time he must yield to another impulse.

"I don't want to make a fuss about saying good-bye. I don't want worthless socially-polite little sayings—no, I am wrong—the emptiest social phrase from you would have a place in my memory."

He had yielded to the impulse; by word and look he had said, that her most trifling act was more to him than the most important act of any other woman.

"I do not want to say any more to you. I do not want to vex you;" his voice was growing husky and passionate. "There are many things that I would like to say—many things about which, if I dared, I would seek

your counsel, your help. But that I cannot do."

The vivid colour had rushed over the girl's face and her eyes had fallen, but here she bravely raised her head and looked at him while she strove after self-possession.

"It distresses me—I scarcely understand you," she faltered.

"I am unreasonable, you must forgive me. I wonder, if you knew all, whether you could forgive me—I doubt it, I do not think it possible."

An expression of suffering came into the speaker's face, and lifting his eyes from those of the girl to whom he was speaking, he looked with a dim far-off expression over her head.

"Pray do not ask me to forgive you. I have nothing to forgive." Frances was very pale, and her lips trembled, and it seemed almost for a moment as if she were going to put one hand out toward her companion, then it fell back again and closed over the other tightly.

"Thank you." And Sidney's eyes wandered back to the face before him. "It has been very selfish of me—and yet but for a moment's pain, I knew you could not suffer by it. Had it been otherwise, if I could have hoped—what am I saying? I am talking like a fool to you."

A feeling of exasperation was taking possession of Sidney. He had made a kind of half-declaration of love, from a strong yearning for some sign on which love might feed; and had then broken off abruptly without either gaining what he wanted, or meeting with the rebuff which would have silenced him. And he began to talk in unintelligible sentences.

"Some day I shall ask you to hear me out, but not while circumstances, and, and—your influence keep me away. Your grace, your refinement hold me; but your goodness makes me feel that I must get to the farthest corners of the earth. I know I am speaking in riddles. I know that my words must sound

like incoherent ravings. But it eases me to say these things to you." He paused, and it seemed to him that he was going to swerve wholly from his determination to keep himself free. He felt as if he were losing all restraint over himself, as if in another moment he would have told Frances of the love he had for her.

"Help me in this," he suddenly broke out, turning his face sharply away from her. "Help me by bitter words—say something roughly to me—say——"

"How, when I do not understand what you are talking of, can I speak roughly? How can I use bitter words when there has been nothing to make me angry?" She stopped abruptly; her lips were trembling, and she evidently could not trust herself to say anything more.

He turned his head slowly to her, a dark shadow beginning to come beneath his eyes. He felt like one whose feet are slipping over the grassy slope of a precipice, and who strikes

out vainly for something to grasp at with his hands.

"Forgive me. I should not have said what I have to you. Good-bye."

Yet he stood there, and did not so much as offer her his hand. Perhaps he was forgetting the resolution which he had made that morning with such a show of courage; or the power to hold it was passing away from him.

The quickly sympathetic nature of the girl taught her instantly something of his need, as with determined self-forgetfulness she strove after composure.

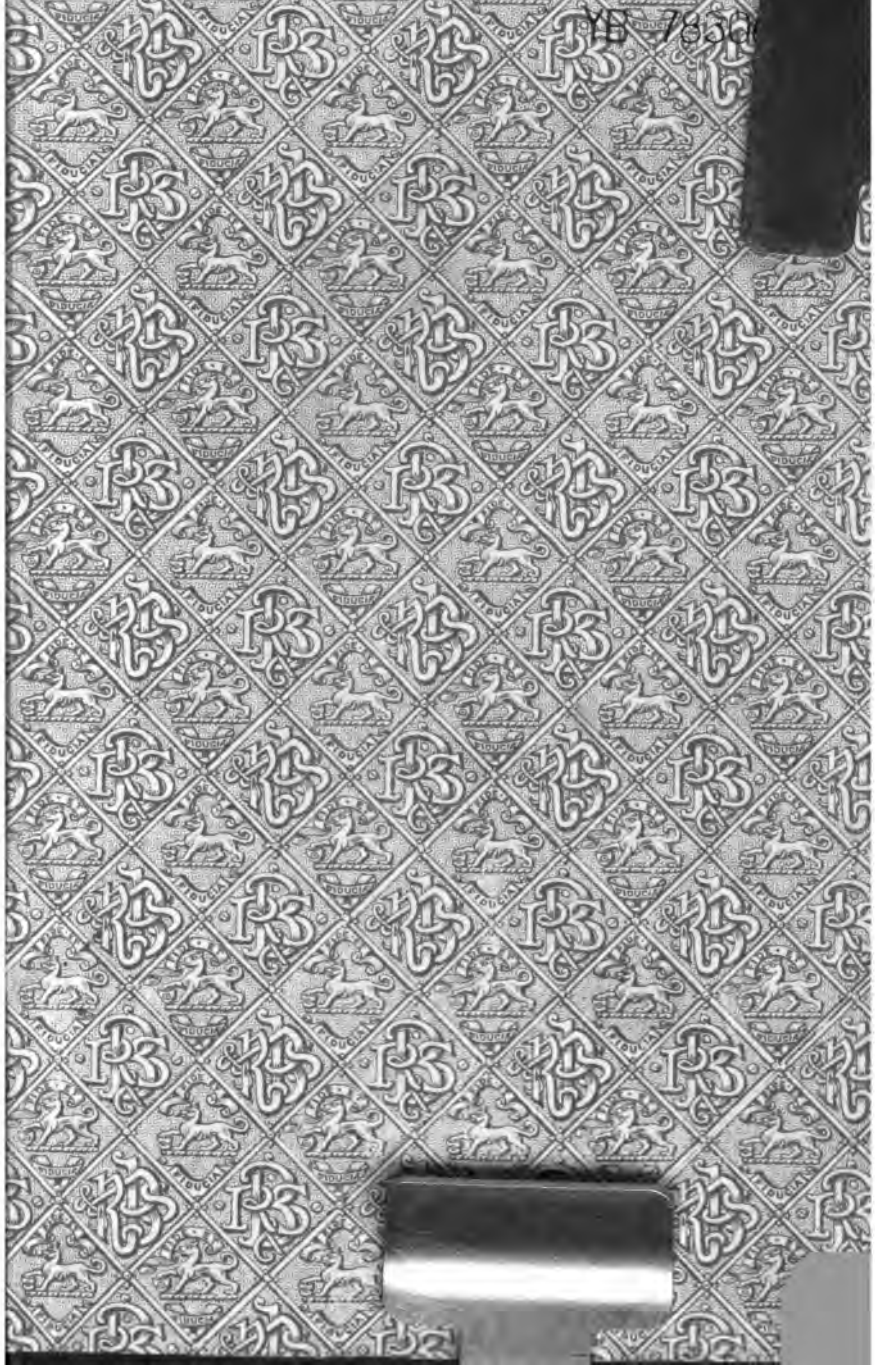
"Good-bye;" and she extended her hand to him; "thank you very much for coming to tell me you are going away. I am glad it is a sunny morning: it is pleasant to have fine weather when one is travelling. Good-bye;" and she drew her hand away from him. "I hope you will enjoy yourself, for, although you did say you were going away on business, I hope you will have a very pleasant time."

She was talking confusedly, hardly knowing what she said. Something told her that if she could help him, in addition to an assumed composure, she must give some slight check to their conversation, some intimation that she desired to be left by him; kindness, she felt, could not be borne from her just then; and so she went away abruptly, striving to temper the sharpness of the act by a smile.

Sidney did not move from beneath the palm tree, only stood and watched her as she went out of the door. What had he gained, he wondered bitterly, by this interview; nay rather, how much had he lost? And here that which had been lurking darkly in the recesses of his mind came forward, and he knew that he was leaving Derthwaite to be rid of Maggie.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES. S. & H.


FIDUCIA